THE BOOK REVIEW

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FOCUS ON BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

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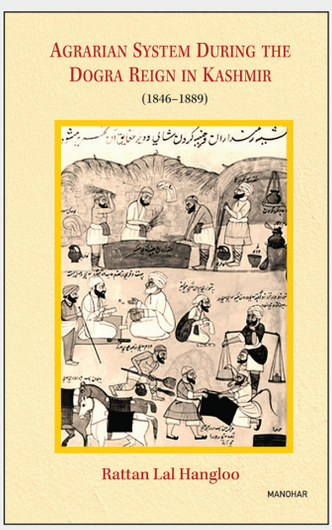

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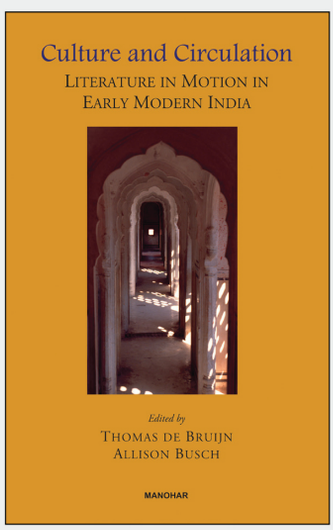

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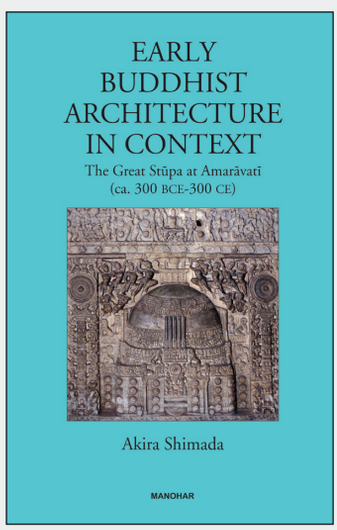

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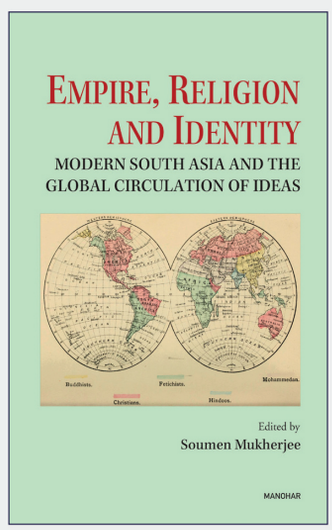

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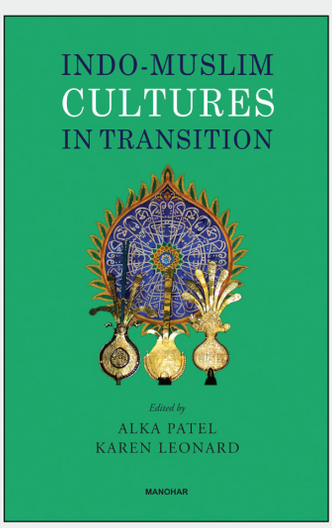

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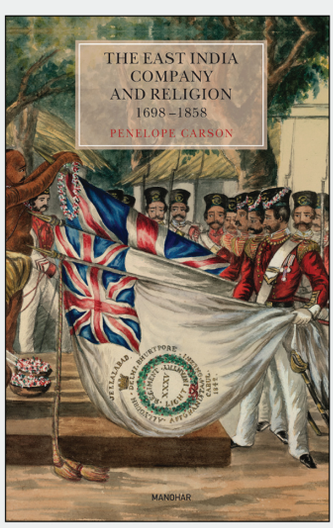

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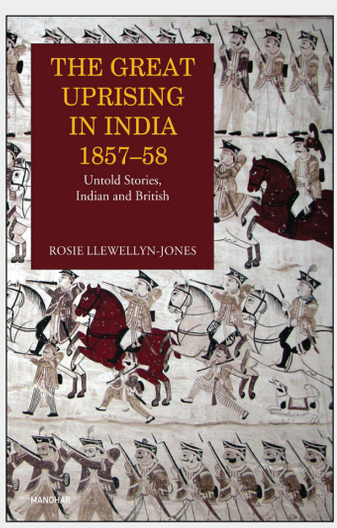

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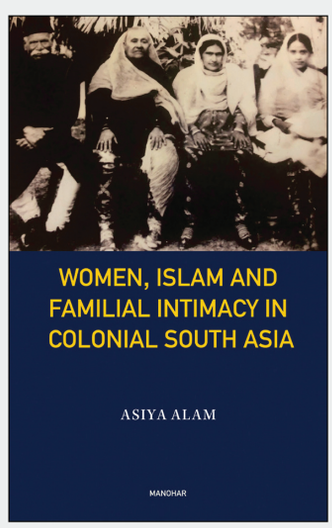

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Children's Books: Special Issue

'A book is like a garden carried in the pocket.' –Chinese proverb

A book at once offers endless possibilities of growth and tranquillity much like a garden, with flowers of knowledge and wisdom that never stop blooming; it is an avenue one may visit anytime from anywhere. For children to have access to a variety of books is to allow them a peep into the larger world beyond their primary environment, introduce them to heroes/heroines they can look up to, inspire creativity, instil empathy, boost their cognitive capabilities to focus, analyse and memorize, and enable them to discover and explore their likings in an immersive experience beyond their screen time.

As per a global study of trends in children's and young adults' book market in March 2024, the industry is growing steadily—from USD 11.76 billion in 2023, it is expected to cross USD 12 billion in 2024.[1] Authors, translators, illustrators, editors and publishers are collectively working hard to help young readers adjust better to the ever-changing world. An effort in the same vein, the team at *The Book Review* is happy to present its annual Children's Special Issue to its readers both young and older. It is a carefully curated collection of recently published books in English, Hindi and Bangla for children across different age groups—Beginners (ages 3 to 7), Middle Readers (ages 8 to 12), Early Teens (ages 13 to 15) and Young Adults (ages 16 to 18).

The leading section on Reading and Education opens with Satish C Aikant's review of Harish Trivedi and Lalit Kumar's book on Amaranatha Jha, former Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University (1938-1947), 'dealing with his views on a range of issues such as English literature, Indian Writing in English, Indian Languages, Kipling, Tagore, the state of higher education in India and the role of university teachers.' Anjana Neira Dev's review of *Children's Books: An Indian Story* edited by Shailaja Menon and Sandhya Rao offers a keen observation: 'While Indian children have always had stories told to them, it is only recently that the question of these children as active agents of the narrative rather than just its passive receptors has been raised.' The book also addresses issues faced by the industry—of quality, authenticity, differential literacy and linguistic diversity, to name a few. Toolika Wadhwa reviews SP Mishra's book which is 'a ready reference for parents' that 'covers ten key themes that are couched in psychology, economics, financial management and sociology', and Prabir Purkayastha's book which brings 'attention to the important yet often ignored aspect of interface of science with society and with commerce'.

The section for Beginners includes books from Hachette, India which explore themes of acceptance and friendship, a picture dictionary with 'focus on inclusivity and cultural sensitivity', and other titles spanning familial experiences of a young child: ageing grandparents, elders breaking gender stereotypes, and one's relationship with pets. Children are introduced to nature in titles by various authors. The fear of losing a loved one or being lost is addressed as also how to acknowledge and defeat the fear of mathematics through activity-based learning. Sanjib Mukhopadhyay reviews five books in Bangla from the house of Eklavya across various themes.

For our Middle Readers, we bring a mix of stories old and new. Semeen Ali reviews multiple titles from Pratham Books which highlight 'the importance of children's voices in driving societal change', and 'language and its connection to identity'; Jane Sahi reviews Arunava Sinha's translation of *Kabuliwallah* by Rabindranath Tagore which 'seems particularly relevant at the present time when children are often growing up in an atmosphere of fear of the stranger and suspicion of the outsider.' Discrimination and self-doubt are dealt with as are experiences of travel. Books by Sudha Murty follow to remind readers 'that often the most ordinary things in life are the most valuable'. There are also myths and folk stories/riddles, sharing important life lessons with the young.

Similar themes in greater depth are presented for our Early Teens. Aisha Kawalkar reviews *Bio-Inspired!* by Muriel Zürcher which is about how 'nature's ingenuity has influenced innovation', for example, 'the aerodynamic design of aeroplanes mimicking the gliding of birds to reduce fuel consumption'. Titles like *The Plum Tree* by Hans Sande explore the nuances of growing up. How language acquired its present form is discussed; Vikram Seth's translation of *The Hanuman Chalisa* is an attempt to make culture more accessible to children. Hindi titles include a famous traditional Japanese folktale rewritten by Sara Cone Bryant, offering lessons in critical decision-making. Nidhi Qazi's review provides a philosophical view of nature—how 'the mundane can become mindful' if sights and sounds in nature are paid attention to.

The collection for Young Adults focuses on diverse subjects like Indian history—accounts of India's unification and 'of individuals whose contribution to the Independence struggle went unrecognized', themes rarely discussed in textbooks; history of battalions, of the movement of forces, of wartime strategies and the reasoning behind tactics employed in times of conflict. Non-fiction titles include works on nature and for self-help: an anthology on the natural world spanning three centuries; a much-needed title on the sync between mental and physical health, especially for young adults. Shubhra Seth reviews a collection of fairy tales narrated by disabled women piecing together their lived experiences. Fiction titles in English and Hindi include tales of identity quest and ambition, communalism and issues of urban life. The section closes with Asfia Jamal and Kaniska's review of a title which 'reflects on the existential question of the future of humanity'.

Our most sincere thanks to all our reviewers without whom this Special Issue could not have been put together. We are grateful to Tultul Biswas, Shailaja Srinivasan and Kanak Shashi of Eklavya Foundation, and Ragini Lalit of Muskan for their immense help in identifying books and reviewers for the Special Issue as also for permitting us to use two illustrations from *Chakmak's* bank of children's drawings, one for the cover by Rudra Gosawi of Class VII, and on p. 12 by Suragi, age 7.

It is our endeavour to provide young readers with the freedom to explore narratives of all kind, especially those which transcend expectations of physical perfection and a perfect life. It is time children's literature is perceived as a genre in itself where children are allowed to confront difficult truths to find hope in endings and learn how to make a difference through action.

Palak Hajela works as Editorial Assistant with *The Book Review* since 2019.

1. https://www.thebusinessresearchcompany.com/report/children-and-young-adult-books-global-market-report

Amaranatha Jha: A Renaissance Man

Satish C Aikant

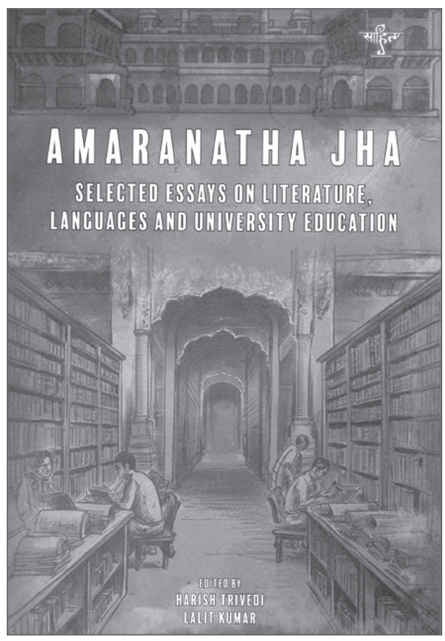
AMARANATHA JHA: SELECTED ESSAYS ON LITERATURE, LANGUAGES AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION
Edited by Harish Trivedi and Lalit Kumar
Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2024, pp. xxviii+306,
₹ 400.00

Allahabad derives its identity not only from the holy Triveni—confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the subterranean Saraswati, but also from the Allahabad University (founded in 1887). There was a time when Allahabad University was known as the 'Oxford of the East' for such was its renown as a seat of learning and academic excellence. The one Vice-Chancellor whose name became synonymous with the University was Dr. Amaranatha Jha who at twenty-two was also the youngest Professor of English at the University. Jha was Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University for three successive terms from 1938 to 1947.

An alumnus recalls a memorable debate organized by the English department on the topic, 'Should India remain in the Commonwealth?' Such was the reputation of the English department that a team from Oxford University came to participate in the debate. When the first prize went to a student of the host university there was roaring applause by the audience which included visitors from Oxford. Jha himself was a most accomplished speaker, profoundly impressive and argumentative, reminding one of the Athenian orators of yore.

Amaranatha Jha: Selected Essays on Literature, Languages and University Education edited by Harish Trivedi and Lalit Kumar puts together the seminal writings of the legendary educator-administrator dealing with his views on a range of issues such as English literature, Indian Writing in English, Indian Languages, Kipling, Tagore, the state of higher education in India and the role of university teachers today. The essays are supplemented with tributes and anecdotes by those who came to be associated with Jha and who came within his charmed circle.

The volume opens with the essay 'The Appeal of English Literature' which is the text of Jha's lecture delivered at the Literary Club at Allahabad in 1939. The author makes a spirited defence of English Literature which was being ignored by some Indian scholars who were overawed by European literatures. It is crucial, he feels, to value English Literature for its propensity to spread the ideas of freedom, of responsible government and democracy and universal education—all derived from the writings of Burke, Godwin, Mill, Byron, Swinburne, Morley and several other English men of letters.



Jha's critical genius is conspicuous in its originality when he interprets Shakespeare's plays not only highlighting major characters as protagonists but also the minor cast who are no less important. In his discussion of *Hamlet* in the essay 'Two Misjudged Characters in Shakespeare' the author highlights the dual, though not dubious, loyalty of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That they die an undeserved death does not stir us because of so many other deaths. But it is nonetheless calculated to add that sense of ruin and waste which the tragedy produces.

The 1930s were marked by intense debates on the National Language for India with Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani making claims for it. It remained one of the most emotive issues in India for a long time. Gandhi was a supporter of Hindi as a national language but he wanted it to be Hindustani, which would be a generous mix of Hindi and Urdu, with the use of both the Devanagari and the Arabic scripts. The Congress leadership too broadly supported the idea of Hindustani, a single language with two scripts, although there were many who disagreed with this formulation. Jha strongly opposed this position. In his essay 'Is Urdu a Language of Hindustan?' he maintained that Urdu could never become the language of Hindustan as the entire cultural matrix of Urdu, according to him, was foreign. He liked Urdu, but made his stand clear against its claims for being the national language. On the other hand, he supported the cause of Hindi which alone qualified to be the national language. Yet, he also warned the protagonists of the Hindi literary world that they should not unnecessarily make it Sanskritized and instead, to let it grow as a living language drawing energy from its roots in multilingual surroundings. He was critical of an artificial, stilted and pedantic Hindi. In a way, Jha did not approve of the normative attitude of Hindi to hegemonize the linguistic diversity of other regional languages such as Maithili

which constituted a vibrant public sphere. Time and again he expressed his view that English should be retained not as a national language, but as a language for inter-State and international communication.

Another question which had been agitating the public mind for long was that of the medium of instruction in our universities (p. 187). Jha acknowledged that we owe much to the English language. Among the forces that united India and made us one nation, English must be reckoned to have been one of the most powerful. 'We found inspiration in our national struggle in the writings of several British liberal thinkers. The annual sessions of the National Congress in the early years could have been conducted only in English. Dadabhai Naoroji could have conversed with W.C. Bonnerji through English and not through any Indian language. There have been notable orators like Surendranath Banerji, Srinivas Sastri, Lalmohan Ghosh and Sarojini Naidu who charmed large audiences, whose command over language was the envy of the natives of England, and whose eloquence was soul stirring' (p. 188). The poetical works of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Romesh Dutt, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Manmohan Ghosh are among the best in the world. However, Jha had reservations about making a foreign language the medium of education. So, while English could not be wished away from our educational system, one's mother tongue should get more prominence.

Jha, above all, was a teacher. He was a guru in every sense of the term exuding natural grace and dignity. Overwhelmed by his very presence, his disciples treated him with utmost respect. His attachment to students was so enduring that even after becoming the Vice-Chancellor, Amaranatha Jha continued to work till his superannuation as warden of the Muir Hostel which was later named after him.

In an inspiring Convocation Address at the Allahabad University, Jha offers advice to his students: 'In all matters, whether great or small, you should try to understand as many points of view as possible; to put yourself in another man's place; to realize that the world is many sided and truth has many phases.' Here is his Socratic maxim: 'Know yourself. Look within and act. Do not be swayed and overwhelmed merely by what others say. Rely upon yourself. The still, small voice within you will be a better guide and a more trustworthy beacon-light than the many voices that tend to confuse and bewilder' (pp. 179-180).

Like Bacon who was a scientist, philosopher, lawyer, politician and a man of letters with varied interests and encyclopaedic learning, Jha had taken all knowledge to be his province. He cites for his students the exemplary life of Michelangelo who attained eminence as painter, sculptor, poet and musician. In our own country we have had in our midst the towering personality of Rabindranath Tagore: poet, dramatist, philosopher, novelist, painter, actor, musician, yes, even politician and teacher.

There is a section in the volume devoted to tributes and memoirs. Justice PN Sapru recalled that Jha was 'a child of the Indian renaissance'. Having read deeply in the literatures of the West and the East, in his own person 'he was a happy synthesis of an integrated personality; modern in his outlook and yet with all that not disconnected with the past of his country' (p. 252). A polyglot, he was fluent in Sanskrit, Bangla, Maithili, Hindi, and Urdu, having read all the classics of these languages.

Jha had built up an enviable reputation as an administrator. Sarojini Naidu once called him 'the Grand Moghul of the University'. There was enough justification for such a remark, for no external authority could interfere in the administration of the University and he was the monarch of all he surveyed.

Jha was wont to call a spade a spade and often crossed swords with the high and the mighty. Once while presiding over a conference of English teachers in 1941, he criticized Nehru's prose. This stirred up a controversy and annoyed the supporters of Nehru. Next day, *The National Herald*, a newspaper patronized by the Indian National Congress and closely associated with Nehru, launched a scathing attack on Jha in its editorial. In the conference, indeed, Jha had said that Nehru could write 'very poor prose, halting, repeating words and phrases, dragging to unnecessary length, bordering on boredom'. But he had added for good measure that Nehru had been at his best in his autobiography and *Letters from a Father to his Daughter* where his prose was characterized by elegance and a distinct literary flavour.

Most of his colleagues had high praise for Jha except for a few who, like PD Tandon, the well-known journalist, considered Jha Saheb 'smug, pretentious, and a power worshipper'. Some even regarded Jha as being snobbish in his attitude. It was perhaps that over the years Jha had cultivated a persona of a grand Saheb, complete with suit, cane and cigar and a slow and deliberate manner of speaking which kept most people at an arm's length.

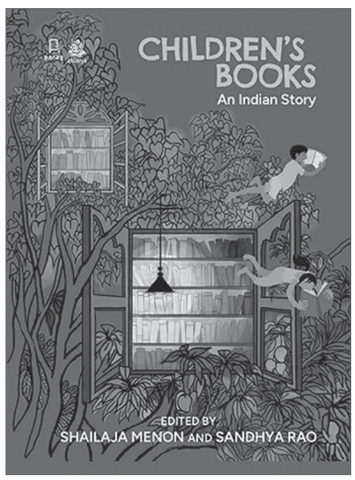
The book makes seminal contribution to Indian intellectual history serving as a testament to Amaranatha Jha's enduring influence on Indian academia and his commitment to fostering a culture of intellectual curiosity and excellence. It brings out his multifaceted personality as a scholar, educator, and institution-builder. In his visionary leadership as Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University, he took several initiatives to promote academic excellence and interdisciplinary research assuming social responsibility as a pioneering educationist.

Anjana Neira Dev

CHILDREN'S BOOKS: AN INDIAN STORY
Edited by Shailaja Menon and Sandhya Rao
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 424, ₹ 424.00

This fascinating story about Children's Books in India is narrated using extensive research and enough anecdotal evidence to make its perusal informative and enriching for anyone interested in this burgeoning field of literary production and study. This is probably the first time that publishers, authors, illustrators, editors, translators, librarians and educators have collaborated to share their research and wide-ranging experiences to chart the terrain and offer desirable future directions. The book clarifies its scope and delimitations at the outset by stating its linguistic and chronological as well as regional contours, and therefore anticipates any critiques in relation to inclusions and exclusions. The citations and bibliography that conclude each chapter adhere to academic best practices, serve to pique the reader's interest and encourage further exploration of the themes and concerns that may be of interest or study. The ground covered is extensive in range and this is finely balanced with the depth of analysis that is rarely found when such genre-specific histories are written.

The agenda and inspiration shared by all the contributors and articulated indubitably by the editors in their Introduction to the collection of essays, is to familiarize as many Indian children as possible with the joys of reading by creating books that resonate with them and reflect their world and help them find their meaningful place in it. The socio-economic fountainhead of this initiative is the boom in publishing of children's books, especially in the last three decades in India, following economic liberalization and accompanied by scholarly research and interest as well as civil society initiatives and interventions. Besides the quantitative leap in the number of children's books being published there is also a tectonic shift in the modes of production, the role of illustrations and graphics, and the stretching of boundaries beyond the fabular and mythological to include topics that would earlier have been taboo as mandated by the adult gatekeepers of this arena. While Indian children have always had stories told to them, it is only recently that the question of these children as active agents of the narrative rather than just its passive receptors has been raised and this is where this wonderful book plays a starring role. One of the most interesting concerns raised by this volume of essays is the fact of children's literature being an artefact that is a synergy of multiple variables, and to understand what it is and where it is headed needs a thoughtful investigation as well as a sincere desire to create an ambient climate for children to read. Even though 'trade books', those written for entertainment and enjoyment, account for only about four per cent of all the children's books published in the country, they are enough to start this conversation and take it forward. Some of the major challenges faced by those who are engaged in the creation of literature for children in India are: quality, authenticity, validity, voice and perspective; as well as the need to balance the message and the medium of transmission, not to talk of differential literacy and linguistic diversity. These are some of the challenges that are confronted in the four sections into which the book is divided.



The first section is appositely titled 'Understanding the Terrain: Children's Literature in India', and includes two essays and a thoughtful and thought-provoking 'companion piece' by a publisher on the history of children's literature in India from its regionally diverse oral and performative origins to the present. The textual evidence is amply complemented by illustrations and examples so that the adult reader is also invited to share in the myriad wonders of storytelling that form an integral part of cultural heritage and repository of the subcontinent. The story then segues into the contemporary avatars of the field with its hybridity of media forms and innovations in production and transmission. This opening section of the volume raises as many questions as it answers and the voices we hear are multivocal, a useful metonymic parallel for the kind of books that the contributors are pitching for. The two main questions that this section drew my attention to are related to the adult gatekeepers of the world of children's literature and the need for if not indigenizing the themes and content but at least making them true reflections of the lives of their young readers.

The second section of this collection is called 'The Moving Landscape: Looking at Books', and the four essays and two companion pieces included in it do exactly what the dominant verb in the section title demands: observe closely how books for children look and what they look at. The first essay has illustration trends and challenges as its focus and reminds us how vital picture books and pictures in books are, to introduce children to curiosity, critical thought and an understanding of the world they inhabit. The pictures with which the essay is generously endowed speak eloquently of the power of

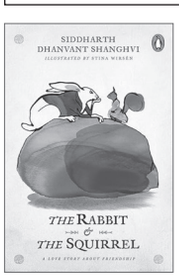
pictures in books for children. There is a change in gears in the third essay as we enter the minefield of didacticism and morality, and debate the enduring appeal and saleability of stories with an overt ethical message and lesson. This essay also expands the scope of the ongoing discussion to include the use and sometimes misuse of humour in children's stories as well as the yet relatively limited fields of poetry and drama written specifically for the young Indian reader. The writerly reflection in this section reminds us how important it is to find the vocabulary to mirror the immediate environment of the readers for whom the books are primarily intended and how fraught the process is with problems of diversity and inclusion. The third essay explores the ideology of existing generic and thematic boundaries through a discussion of creative non-fiction and graphic narratives and the limitless possibilities for creativity if our plots, characters and action are to go beyond familiar horizons of normativity. The concluding chapter in this section ventures into an exploration of the nascent genre of young adult fiction that is a recent entrant into the conversation and one that has generated a lot of interesting debates in the field.

The third section of this collection is titled 'Uneven Ground: Issues in Children's Literature' and the four essays and a reflective companion piece bring to the fore those areas of silence and darkness that have beleaguered children's literature in India, and their foregrounding becomes essential to give shape to the aspiration with which this book has been painstakingly compiled. The first chapter is dialogic and using inputs from a range of writers, centers the discussion on the fraught areas of diversity and representation with a laudable impulse to tip the balance of bias towards more inclusive storytelling in terms of language, gender and sexuality, neurodiversity, caste and intersectionality, to name a few of the more prominent challenges that face all writers, but especially those writing for children and young adults. The next essay reminds us how we take the simplest actions for granted if we are abled and how challenging even the simple act of turning the page of a book can be for a differently abled reader. The writer of this chapter has researched extensively on the physical and intellectual barriers faced by some readers and how these are beginning to be addressed by publishers who are experimenting and innovating to make books inclusive and accessible to all readers. The reflective piece in this section is from one of the key players in the field of children's books, the editor, who dons multiple hats– friend, critic, mediator, confidant, etc., and is often the final piece in the creative puzzle, before the book goes into print. The next essay is a thoughtful and practical exploration of translations of children's books and deals extensively with challenges and triumphs in equal measure. The final essay of this third section lists some of the milestones and dominant challenges in the field and these include issues of languages, caste and class, diversity and plurality, as well as concerns about textual aesthetics and designs.

The fourth and final section of the book attempts to set up a dialogue between the two characters in the children's book story, school books and trade books, by seeing if the latter can comfortably and self-assuredly accompany the former to teach and educate the children who are after all the target audience for both. The first essay has as its central concern the importance of literature in the life of an individual, especially a young reader whose sense and sensibility are work in progress and whose thinking and being in the world are significantly influenced through literary engagement. Through a series of classroom and other activities the writers walk us through the creation of a suitable environment for forging a bond between children and literature. The second essay is an in-depth analysis of the way children respond to literature, construct and deconstruct, agree with and interrogate adult analyses and in the process form independent and self-reliant personalities of their own. The penultimate companion piece in this collection is by a reader who metacognitively analyses her evolution as a reader and the way this has facilitated her passing the baton to other readers. The final two contributions in this ambitious collection are from the perspective of those who manage that space outside of a bookstore that gives us access to books—the library. While the essay is a biography of the free library movement and the need for this to become a norm rather than a singular example, the final companion piece is an eloquent appeal by a librarian to let children read with freedom and joy.

The editors modestly claim at the outset that this book was put together to foster a spirit of understanding and initiate a grand conversation about children's books in India and they have undoubtedly succeeded. As I read each essay and companion piece, I met many old favorites that I cut my reading milk teeth on, and have also been introduced to many new friends whom I would love to get to know. This book bears eloquent testimony to the sheer range of books being thoughtfully created for children in India and the story is as encouraging as it is inspirational.

Book News ***Book News***



The Rabbit and the Squirrel: A Love Story about Friendship by Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi, illustrated by Stina Wirsén, is a charmed fable for young adults, in which one life, against all odds, is fated for the other.

Penguin, 2024, pp. 48, ₹ 299.00

Toolika Wadhwa

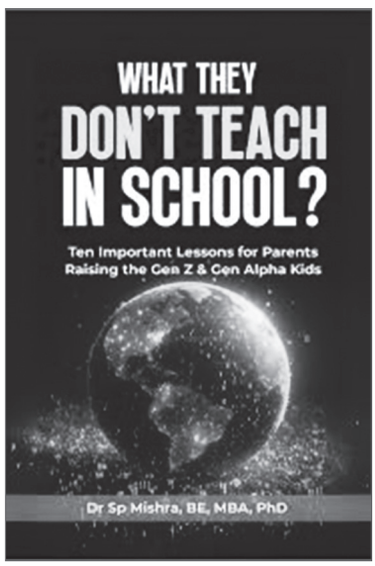
WHAT THEY DON'T TEACH IN SCHOOL? TEN IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR PARENTS RAISING THE GEN Z & GEN ALPHA KIDS
By SP Mishra
Notion Press, 2023, pp. 165, ₹ 459.00

Schooling is an important experience for children. Stepping out of the comfort and safety of their homes, children learn—for the first time—to adapt to the world around them that has the potential to be supportive, but sometimes also unforgiving. Growing up, school is the one place where children form life-long friendships and also learn lessons that will help them navigate through adult life. Yet, most schooling revolves around structuring lessons in disciplinary subject areas. Life skills that children learn in schools appear to be an ancillary achievement that have received little conscious thought and effort.

In this book, the author brings to the fore some of these lessons. Aptly titled *What They Don't Teach in School?,* the book is a ready reference for parents. The world is changing at a pace faster than ever before. As children learn to adapt, parents must also learn to help children in the process that is necessary but also overwhelming. Parents need to equip themselves with ready tools to help their children make sense of the world around them. Drawing from his own experience as a doctor and as a parent, Mishra has carefully selected ten important life lessons that are pertinent for children born in the twenty-first century. What parents learnt in their teenage and what they saw their parents do holds little relevance for the children and adolescents of today. The concerns of parents in making sense of the parenting process revolve around not just the present but also towards decisions of how to prepare their children for the future.

The book covers ten key themes that are couched in psychology, economics, financial management and sociology. The book is unique and useful in its endeavour to bring theories from multidisciplinary perspectives to the general public. Parents may not have access to or be able to comprehend theories from diverse fields and understand their applicability to everyday life. In this effort, the author has been able to draw upon useful references and make them accessible in simple and practical language.

The author talks about the importance of reprogramming the mind to enhance efficiency, productivity and self-confidence. This has been done through reference to theories in psychology, particularly cognitive science. Building habits that are useful in the short and long run can be done through a process of cognitive restructuring. The author emphasizes the useful habit of journaling. While it is recommended that children develop this habit early, parents can themselves also benefit from a process of reflective journal writing on a regular basis. Besides psychology, this habit formation also draws upon a concept in economics. Documenting 'aggregation of marginal gains' can be a great motivator to work with greater efficiency and develop life-transforming habits.



The book also talks about holistic development with equal emphasis on physical, mental and spiritual health. The author provides tips to improve in each of these areas. Besides personal growth, the book also covers areas of financial planning and investment, and career choices. In contemporary times, it is important for parents to be futuristic in their outlook. The traditional professional choices of medicine, law, and accountancy have given way to specialized branches that are likely to be in greater demand in the future. The book discusses some of these trends to identify potential areas of future career paths. One of the most useful chapters in the book provides step-by-step recommendations to making a career choice. Throughout the book, the emphasis is on greater innovation and adaptability.

While the book is an immensely valuable resource in itself, the coverage of a vast and diverse range of topics has led to a compromise in the depth of the topics. The author could endeavour towards a longer version of the book that would cover each of these areas in greater depth. Individual concepts referred to in the book can then be understood within the context of the theories from which they have been drawn. Alternatively, the author may also provide a list of additional resources and references at the end of each chapter, for readers to explore further in case they find a topic particularly useful and/or interesting.

The book primarily targets parents of children and adolescents who wish to consciously choose the life that their children lead. However, older children can themselves benefit from reading the book to address some of their concerns independently.

Toolika Wadhwa

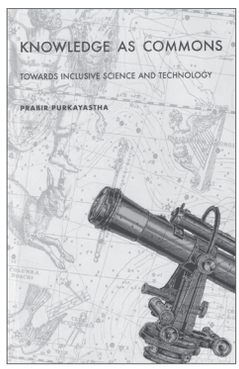
KNOWLEDGE AS COMMONS: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
By Prabir Purkayastha
LeftWord, Books, New Delhi, 2023, pp. 298, ₹ 395.00

The book is a collection of essays that discuss various dimensions of the nature and knowledge of science. Bringing attention to the important yet often ignored aspect of interface of science with society and with commerce. The author argues against market drive progress in new knowledge in science that benefits only the privileged capitalists, further marginalizing the excluded.

Progress in scientific knowledge was earlier through scientific societies funded by patronage of the aristocrats. In the early twentieth century, knowledge generation in science began to be confined to the structure of educational institutions and the universities. With greater state funding and autonomy of university research institutions over knowledge generation, patents and other intellectual property rights became a source of funds. Referring to the increasing commercialization of education, Purkayastha writes: 'Knowledge and larger social groups are sacrificed to the neoliberal economic order which values immediate gain as the driver of science' (p. 23).

Recent advances in the field of agriculture and medicine have pointed towards the vested interests of capitalists in promoting developments and innovations that benefit a few, and continue to perpetuate an exclusionary society. The impact of genetically modified seeds will only be fully evident over the next generations. In the meantime, despite an unprecedented speed of development of vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, thirty per cent of the world's population continues to live without access to vaccines.

Technological developments go hand-in-hand with development in the nature of knowledge in science. However, much of technological development is based on skills, experience and intuition which makes it less easy to disseminate than knowledge development in science. Technology is often seen as the poorer cousin of science, relegated to the sidelines. Often criticized for application of science to disastrous consequences such as in the case of Hiroshima, Chernobyl, and the Bhopal gas tragedy, among others, academicians prefer to not discuss developments in technology. The author argues that the misunderstanding stems from non-recognition of the differences in purposes of science and technology. While science focusses on understanding nature, the purpose of technology is to build material artefacts. The author correctly points out that 'the development of the instruments of enquiry has grown today to such a level as to lead to arguments that scientific reality itself is mediated by technology and that is the sine qua non of the scientific enterprise' (p. 107). He further writes: 'No technological artefact can be constructed without understanding nature in some sense; nor can such an artefact be based purely on established knowledge' (p. 108). The argument of primacy of science over technology and the resultant belief of science being the lead and technology lagging behind is falsified with this acceptance of interrelationship between the two.



The eleven essays in the book cover a range of topics in the area of nature of knowledge in technology and the need for it to be accessible to and serve the purposes of all. Categorized into four themes, these essays have been presented in four sections in the book. Section One titled 'Knowledge for All: Capital vs the People', presents three essays that discuss contemporary developments in the field of science and whose purposes it has served. In Section Two, 'Paradigm Shifts in Technology', the three essays discuss the socio-political dimensions behind developments in the field of technology. The next three essays explore the historical developments to point out how technological developments have been used to serve the purposes of the elite and powerful classes in the society. In doing so, the interests of the masses have been relegated to the margins. This section is titled 'Mapping Public Interest in Science and Technology'. The final section titled 'Planning the Republic of Reason' is pivotal in building a world order that is based on the principles of justice and equity. In the two essays in this section the author draws upon examples from the contemporary Indian political scenario to point towards the interconnections between science and technology, and the building of a new world order.

Developments in science and technology cannot be divorced in their use from social realities. Decision of developments and design may choose to favour the few. Alternatively, technology can also be used for creating divisive societies as we have seen in the use of mass communication tools for propaganda by Mussolini and Hitler in the past. The more recent times have seen the use of social media to create more fascist states. The knowledge economy plays a major role in creating socio-economically divisive societies. Reconstructing an India as unequal as it was in the colonial times is done strategically focussing more on manufacturing rather than generating new knowledge. The author rightly concludes that such a focus would work towards recolonizing the country by giving the control of knowledge in

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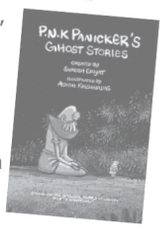

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the hands of outside powers. The book powerfully concludes: 'Our battle is for the sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, republic that we envisioned during the Independence movement' (p. 255).

The book serves as a valuable resource for teachers, teacher educators as well as practitioners in the field of science. Science as a field of knowledge is often seen as disconnected from the politics of a divisive society. It is time that teachers recognized the interconnections and used the knowledge of history, sociology and commerce to build better scientists and human beings.

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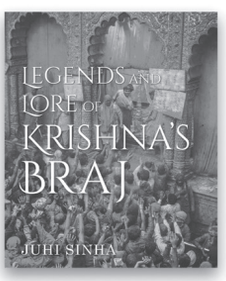

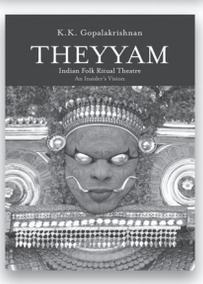

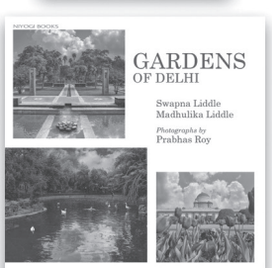

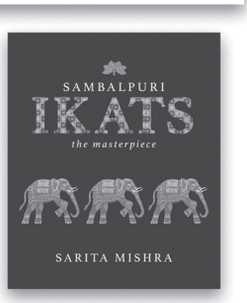

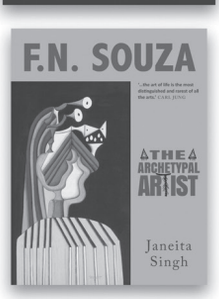

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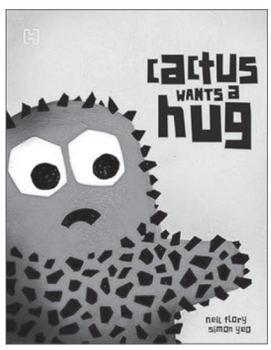
Rafia Reshi

CACTUS WANTS A HUG
By Neil Flory. Illustrated by Simon Yeo
Hachette India, 2024, pp. 32, ₹ 399.00



Cactus Wants a Hug is a charming picture book that explores themes of friendship, acceptance, and perseverance. The story follows Cactus, the book's main character, who, despite his prickly exterior, longs for a hug. Determined to find one, Cactus ventures far beyond his desert home, searching high and low for a warm embrace.

However, his search proves challenging; his prickly nature causes discomfort for anyone he encounters, leading to a series of comical and unfortunate 'caramba' moments. As Cactus faces disappointment and feels like giving up, he is surprised by an unexpected act of kindness that teaches him about true friendship.

The book is sweet and funny, with delightful illustrations by Simon Yeo that vividly bring the story to life. The visual storytelling complements Neil Flory's narrative, making the tale engaging and accessible for young readers.

While the story is heartwarming and offers valuable lessons about seeking friendship and embracing differences, some readers might feel that the content could have been more developed. Nonetheless, *Cactus Wants a Hug* remains a touching and entertaining read, celebrating the idea that even those who seem unlikely to find a friend can be pleasantly surprised.

LAKSHMI'S LITTLE BIRD
By Sharanya Kunnath
Hachette India, 2024, pp. 32, ₹ 399.00

Lakshmi's Little Bird is a heartwarming picture book that beautifully explores themes of acceptance and finding unexpected friendships. The story centres around Lakshmi, a cow who yearns for a special friend of her own—a bird she can call her '*pakshi*'.

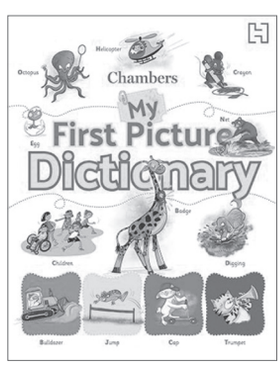
In her pastoral world, every other cow has a bird buddy—a fact Lakshmi's mother has emphasized upon, making her desire even stronger. Despite Lakshmi's hopeful waiting and the arrival of many birds, none of them stay. Each visitor flutters by without forming the lasting bond Lakshmi dreams of. Yet, with a skip in her step and a twinkle in her eye, she remains optimistic and patient.

The narrative takes a delightful turn when, one day, a cheerful, chatty bird arrives, bringing with it a burst of laughter and a promise of potential. Lakshmi's heart leaps with hope—could this be the bird that will stay and become her forever friend? The story gently guides readers through Lakshmi's journey as she navigates the excitement and uncertainties of finding her perfect companion.

Illustrated with warmth and charm by the author, the book captures the essence of Lakshmi's quest and the joy of discovering a true friend in the most unexpected place. Sharanya Kunnath's engaging storytelling, combined with vibrant illustrations, creates a touching tale that celebrates friendship and the beauty of finding connections where least expected.

Lakshmi's Little Bird is a delightful read for young children and a perfect addition to any picture book collection. It reminds us all of the value of perseverance and the joy that comes from welcoming friendships into our lives, no matter how unlikely they may seem.

CHAMBERS: MY FIRST PICTURE DICTIONARY
Hachette India, 2024, pp. 64, ₹ 399.00



Chambers: My First Picture Dictionary is an essential resource for young learners embarking on their journey of reading and writing. This beautifully illustrated picture dictionary is specially designed for children who are just beginning to develop their language skills, offering them a fun and engaging way to build their vocabulary. With its vibrant, full-colour illustrations, the dictionary introduces children to a wide range of words through a visually appealing format that makes learning enjoyable and effective.

The dictionary is populated with charming characters like Daljit Duck, Raju Rabbit, Zamil Zebra, and Babu Bear, who guide children through various daily activities while teaching new vocabulary. This blend of animal and human characters not only captures children's attention but also helps them understand and remember words in the context of their everyday experiences. Each entry in the dictionary features an example that provides context and demonstrates the correct usage of the word,

reinforcing the learning process.

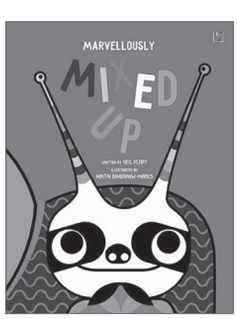
The book is designed to support preschoolers and early learners by using a visual approach that scaffolds their understanding and builds their confidence. The easy-to-navigate layout, combined with an application-led approach, ensures that the dictionary is user-friendly and suitable for both home and school settings. Children will find it easy to identify and learn new words independently, thanks to the dictionary's clear and engaging presentation.

One of the standout features of this dictionary is its focus on inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. The illustrations and content are designed to appeal to a global audience, promoting a sense of inclusivity and breaking down stereotypes. By incorporating a diverse range of characters and scenarios, the dictionary encourages sensitivity to different cultures and fosters social and emotional learning. This approach not only helps children expand their vocabulary but also supports the development of important twenty-first-century skills.

Chambers: My First Picture Dictionary is an invaluable addition to any child's picture book collection. Its comprehensive coverage of everyday objects, aspects of life, and relationships ensures that children are exposed to a wide array of vocabulary relevant to their world. The delightful illustrations and engaging characters make learning an enjoyable experience.

Overall, this dictionary stands out as a must-have tool for young learners. It not only enhances their language skills but also supports their emotional and social development. *Chambers: My First Picture Dictionary* is an excellent choice for parents and educators looking to give children a strong start in their literacy journey.

MARVELLOUSLY MIXED UP
By Neil Flory. Illustrated by Maitri Bimbrahw-Marks
Hachette India, 2024, pp. 32, ₹ 399.00



Marvellously Mixed Up is a wonderfully imaginative picture book that introduces readers to a fantastical world of hybrid creatures. If you've ever wondered what a DONPIDRILL or a SNOTH might look like, or if you've encountered a HEDGEKUNK or a HIPSQUIRROT, this book is sure to delight and surprise you with its creative twists on animal forms.

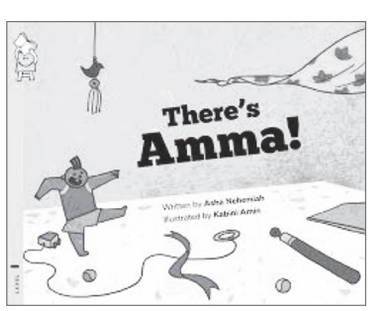
The book showcases a vibrant array of mixed-up creatures, blending characteristics of various animals and birds into whimsical new forms. Each creature is depicted with eye-popping illustrations that bring their fantastical features to life, creating a visually stunning and often hilarious adventure for readers. From the quirky KANGAHOPPER to other imaginative combinations, the illustrations are a feast for the eyes and a playground for the imagination. The book taps into children's creativity and invites them to explore a universe where the normal rules of animal anatomy and behaviour don't apply. It encourages young readers to use their imagination and think outside the box.

However, while the book is a fun and engaging exploration of mythical creatures, some children might find the concept a bit confusing, especially if they are more accustomed to real-world animal facts. Parents and educators might need to provide a bit of guidance to help kids understand and appreciate the imaginative nature of the book.

Overall, Neil Flory's inventive storytelling and Maitri Bimbrahw-Marks's stunning illustrations make *Marvellously Mixed Up* a delightful addition to any child's library. It's a creative adventure that fosters imagination and provides an entertaining and visually captivating experience, even if it requires a bit of context to fully appreciate its fantastical creatures.

Nalini Kalra

THERE'S AMMA!
By Asha Nehemiah. Illustrated by Kabini Amin
Pratham Books, 2024, pp. 11, ₹ 65.00



There's Amma! is a hilarious book where a baby sees its 'Amma' everywhere it goes. Without being specific about the gender, the author has interestingly called it 'baby'. A quick and easy to understand book wherein the baby accompanies the father and the elder brother to pick up a list of things from the market. No one really knows why the baby sees its mother everywhere, even though she is back home. The mother is omnipresent for a child.

The illustrations are quite clear and would engage the interest of Level 1 readers. The reader can identify a number of objects seen in the day-to-day life—be it at home, in the street or the market. Simple and short sentences ensure that the attention of the reader does not waver. It is actually a fun way of teaching young readers

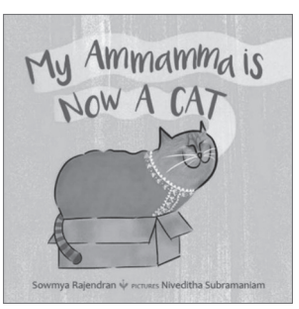
certain opposites, like older and younger or short and long. When the baby points to a lady calling her 'Amma', 'Appa' gently explains that the lady has short hair unlike the baby's mother. Further, when the baby calls a man with a beard 'Amma', the reader is bound to have a good laugh. The reader would clearly understand the difference between older and younger when the father explains that the lady seen in the market is actually older than the baby's mother.

The book ends on a lovely note by bringing out the biggest and the best fact that all children are clever and have their unique way of seeing the world.

The book is well illustrated; the quality of paper is good and will see little damage in the hands of Level 1 explorers.

Simran Sadh

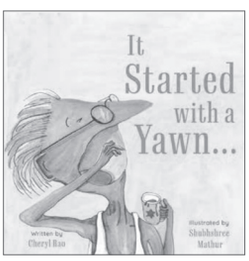
MY AMMAMMA IS NOW A CAT
By Sowmya Rajendran. Illustrated by Niveditha Subramaniam
Tulika Books, Chennai, 2024, pp. 20, ₹ 165.00



The title of the story invites attention from adults and children alike. The story uniquely explores the relationship between a girl and her grandmother as the former notices the changes in her ageing Ammamma. The story draws parallels between the grandmother at the different stages of her life with the characteristic traits of a cat. The illustrations quite interestingly and imaginatively bring out the mischievous and carefree side of Ammamma as she transitions to-and-fro into her cat-like persona–in part, whole and at times, simply in-between. The language and narration lend the story a feeling of it being a grandmother's tale. At the same time, the childlike demeanour and quirks of the grandmother have the potential to capture a young reader's curiosity and initiate conversations around one's own grandparents. The theme of the book is an addition to stories which portray grandparents in a relatable and fun way, as opposed to cornering them in stereotypical silos of being short tempered, preachy or recluses. Such authentic portrayals of the diverse tapestry of human behaviour allow the young child to find resonance in their own lives. While the story could have explored the unfair share of responsibilities that women must account for, right from their childhood to adulthood as daughters, mothers and wives, the adults who read the story with the children can engage them to discuss this and to further create avenues to articulate similar reflections.

Richa Dang

IT STARTED WITH A YAWN…
By Cheryl Rao. Illustrated by Shubhshree Mathur
Daffodil Lane Books, 2024, pp. 30, ₹ 299.00



Some books are more fun when read aloud in small groups or even bigger groups of children. *It Started with a Yawn…* is one such book. Grandfather yawns; a big yawn it is. So big that it makes his ears pop and his grandson has to come to his rescue. The small child uses creative methods, like applying butter on the grandfather's knees among others, but can't help him. As grandfather keeps yawning a doctor is visited, who says that he should sleep to cure his yawns. And the grandfather sleeps as rhythmically as Rao's writing.

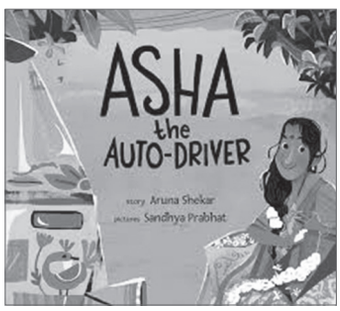
As grandfather sleeps silently without his usual snores, the fear of death creeps into the child. The child then comes up with more interesting ideas to relieve his fear by ensuring his grandfather is alive. The story highlights the beautiful relation between the grandchild and his grandfather. The grandfather's strange ailment and child's stranger solutions ensure that the reader is entertained while still being concerned for the grandfather's health and the child's efforts.

Pop of colours and change of fonts to highlight the text along with large illustrations make the book inviting. Large illustrations which occupy most of the page can help the reader enjoy the story through pictures as well. The book has interesting illustrations which make the strange and fantastic become more real. Like a train and a helicopter landing in a garden, or the child climbing up a shelf to jump on the fan but instead crashing the shelf down. The bright coloured pictures also give an extension to the text by introducing other characters in the family.

The book has no dull moment until the grandfather is well again and is holding the hand of his grandchild once more. It will enthral the children and adults who peep into the pages of this book.

Nita Berry

ASHA THE AUTO-DRIVER
By Aruna Shekar. Illustrated by Sandhya Prabhat
Tulika Books, Chennai, 2024, pp. 24, ₹ 195.00



Asha's auto is one with a difference. Not only does it look attractive with bright flowers painted all over, it smells good too! After all, Asha's first trip every morning is to the flower market to buy a big bag of jasmine buds. She strings these into a long chain and festoons her auto with jasmines while she waits for passengers, and their fragrance fills her auto. Her lucky passengers get jasmine flowers to wear, and she sells them too while waiting for more passengers.

Here is an endearing picture book for the 3+ age group, who will see and learn a lot of interesting things along the way with the ever-smiling Asha. She drives to different destinations in the city–the busy railway station, a dental clinic, a football field, a dance school, a girls' college, the beach, a cricket stadium, a church… every day of the week! And so, we go through all the days of the week as well–from Monday right till Sunday when Asha, bedecked in jasmine flowers herself, will get a well-earned half day off with her family.

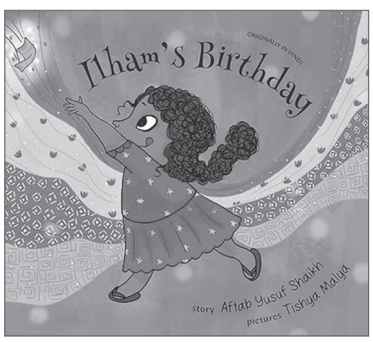
The story of the travels of Asha and her auto unfolds simply in Aruna Shekar's effortless and easy style, and we get to take a trip around Chennai through rain and sunshine. The author is an award-winning teacher and writer for children who has written about life in different parts of India. She now lives in New Zealand.

Sandhya Prabhat's heartwarming illustrations complement the text, and the busy market place, the narrow streets of Chennai and its puddles—all come alive! The inner covers have engaging illustrations of the many people from the inside pages, in a variety of clothes, activities and expressions. An animator from Chennai, she now resides in the USA, illustrates children's picture books and young adult books, and animates for TV and movies.

Tulika Publishers have made a name for themselves over the years for their quality books for young readers, and *Asha the Auto-Driver* is no exception. Little children are bound to enjoy this cheerful picture book, though one wishes the colours used were a tad brighter.

Deepali Shukla

ILHAM'S BIRTHDAY
By Aftab Yusuf Shaikh. Illustrated by Tishya Malya
Tulika Books, Chennai, 2024, pp. 24, ₹ 185.00



An attempt has been made to bring out the feelings of children through Ilham. There is not much twist in the story, but the story gives the reader a chance to guess. Through Ilham's birthday gift, the entire story takes you to the streets of Hyderabad.

It discusses the relationship between children and adults. The adults in this story are sensitive and support Ilham a lot. After reading the story two or three times, it seems that the issue of adults helping children can be discussed with the children through Ilham's story. Aftab Yusuf Sheikh has written a simple story that communicates with the reader without many ups and downs.

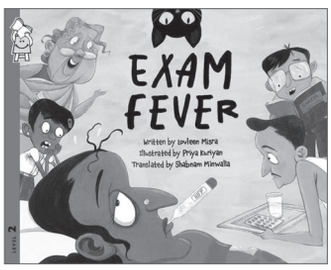
The illustrations have a good depiction of Hyderabad's market. They have many colours, including yellow, blue, green, and pink on the cover, and various shades on the background. The shops in the market also have a lot of colours, from signboards to the goods in the shops. Tishya Malya has done an amazing job of capturing all the expressions in her illustrations, including happiness, worry, peace, and curiosity. The illustrations also help you think about other things, and inspire you. They reveal the presence of languages in the city by showing shop signs in Hindi, Urdu, and Telugu.

Melody Xalxo

EXAM FEVER *(KAISE BHAGAYEN BUKHAR)*
By Lovleen Misra. Illustrated by Priya Kuriyan. Translated from the original Hindi by Shabnam Minwalla
Pratham Books, 2024. pp. 24, ₹ 85.00

Some of us, when we were children or even in our teenage, we were scared of exams; we got anxious, we were stressed, we had the fear of failing, and the fear of our best friend sitting far from our bench resulting

in some sicknesses. Similarly, the title of the book made me think that a child had fever due to the approaching final exams. But that changed when I looked at the cover picture of the book several times. The picture has two children with their big surprised eyes and mouths open, a bulky grandma, who is in a position of singing, and a caring and worried man offering medicines and water to the female character who is sick. At first sight, I thought this female character was a grown-up girl who was going to appear for an exam but when I focused on it, it was a lady and the mother of two children. The book is for Level 2 children who can recognize familiar words and can read new words with help.



The story revolves around a middle-class family where Ma has got a fever before her examination and the whole family is trying to help her to get better. But the fever persists. Finally, on the day of the exam, she writes and writes and writes to get her BA degree.

The story here is written in a simple yet poetic way. It has both English and Hindi words which rhyme beautifully.

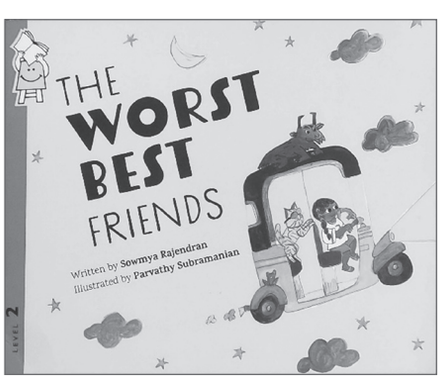
Likewise, the text and the illustrations are mind-blowing. Both are synchronized with each other. While the text tries to tell us the whole story, the emotions lie in the illustrations. The illustrations show us beyond the texts. They are very crisp and clear. It is through these illustrations we can sense that it is the story of a middle-class family, having two children, two pets, parents, and a grandma. We are shown a lady suffering from fever and the whole family, including pets, taking care of her. One of her children is trying to read books for her and the other is trying to make her laugh by prancing like a clown. Pets are trying to be with her so as for her to not feel alone. Grandma on the other hand, is trying to measure the fever and sing a song to improve the environment. And, her husband who is also an ex-army officer, is taking care of his wife. He is seen offering her medicines, feeding her *khichdi*, doing some remedies to shoo away the fever, and often also braiding her hair. Sometimes giving her ironed clothes, and sometimes happily hugging her.

The illustrations show pure love, care, respect, and support towards the ambitions of others. It breaks the stereotype of males not helping in the household, or males who are less sensitive than females. This also challenges the word 'male ego'. In some societies, it is notional for women after a certain age to not pursue higher education, or for housewives to be seen as only meant to do household work and take care of their family. For those who ask, 'What will women do after they get educated?', this book has a perfect example.

Introducing these ideas at the primary level would be very helpful for the children to discuss and relate with, especially knowing and understanding about family structure and the roles and responsibilities of everyone in the family. In a classroom setting of 30 students, all have different family backgrounds, having different perspectives of looking at things. In this scenario, if they are introduced to ideas related to family, work, responsibilities, respect, etc., it not only gives them a full understanding but allows them to raise questions. Although this book is made for Level 2 readers, it also gives a strong picture for adults to think about.

Vanshika Goyal

THE WORST BEST FRIENDS
By Sowmya Rajendran. Illustrated by Parvathy Subramanian
Pratham Books, 2024, pp. 12, ₹ 70.00



The Worst Best Friends is about a girl and her cat, and about their friendship which turns out to be the best for the two of them and the worst for everyone else around them. It is interesting to see how this unfolds and how the same incidents give a laugh bout to young readers.

The narrative follows an alliterative sequence of sentences. It sounds fun when someone reads it aloud to a child, but the same might prove difficult when it comes to them reading on their own. The vocabulary and the language expressions used are a little tough for an average Indian child. We need to accept that majority of Indians are not proficient in English. The home language is therefore preferred in order to help the child connect with reading and formal learning. In such a scenario, when English gets introduced to a primary grade child, it needs to be more accommodating and sensitive to the child's ability to grasp this language. For instance, the first two sentences of the book are very short and simple, but the third sentence shakes up the balance of reading as it is double the first two sentences combined.

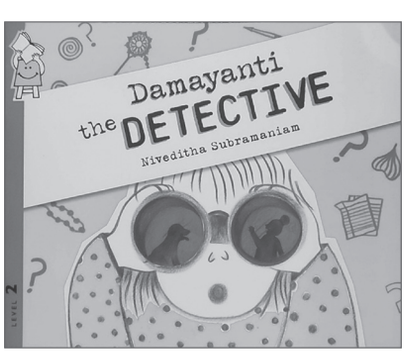
Not only is the length of the sentences heavily varying,

but the expressions also make the sentences further complex for the young readers. Another instance of two difficult expressions used in a single sentence: '…coughs up a hairball', and 'throws up her stew…'. These are not the expressions that define coughing hard and vomiting for majority of children in India.

Parvathy Subramanian's illustrations are sharply expressive and have a specific colour palette which makes it pop-out to the readers. The intended imperfectness of sketching style might make it more relatable for the children. The spooky-mad expressions of the cows, the protagonist's brother, and the coconuts grab attention. The composition could have been explored better as the current arrangement of illustrations is hither-thither to a large extent. While some pages do have the correct balance between different spots depicting the perspective right and helping the action sequence flow smoothly, compositions on some other pages demand the effort of tallying what parts of the written narrative are depicted in the illustration.

Despite the catchy illustrations with great use of white space on the inner pages, the cover with flat dull blue in the background takes away the charm of Parvathy's illustration style and makes the book less attractive for the children to pick. Overall, reading this book will require support for a Level 2 reader.

DAMAYANTI THE DETECTIVE
Text and illustrations by Niveditha Subramaniam
Pratham Books, 2023, pp. 20, ₹ 80.00

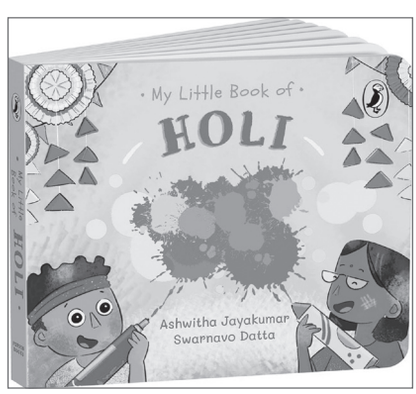


Damayanti the Detective is a fun anecdotal story about a girl who likes to play a detective. Like all detective characters, this one too has some defined traits. Damayanti loves her snack and keeps a pair of binoculars handy for her cases all the time. The story follows this girl through the case of a missing sock, a handkerchief and a hairpin. And her love for snack keeps popping in. While Damayanti tries to solve her case, the plot introduces us to her prime suspects whom she doesn't seem to like much. She calls them 'Sillie Millie', 'Pushpa Flowerpot', and 'Moody Mani' (the dog). The reader is introduced to a large variety of adjectives through this round of introductions, largely well described through the narrative and illustrations. The overall length of the content might seem big, but the descriptive language of the narrative and use of common vocabulary makes it easy to follow for the young readers.

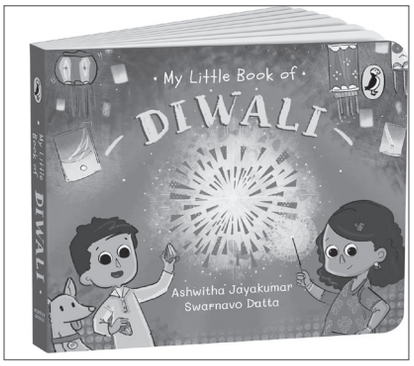
Niveditha's limited palette illustrations selectively highlight the elements that need readers' attention. This complements the narrative, makes it easier to follow and make sense of. Illustrations are revered as a key component in early literacy. Niveditha's red and yellow popping in the right places is an example of this. The current illustrations depict the complete plot sequence correctly through a mix of spot art, frames and panels. There are a few single page close-ups and half page illustrations that provide a sneak peek into the scene, but those come much later in the book. Till then, it seems more like just a visual translation of the written word and doesn't invoke much interest in the visuals. The illustration style has scope for larger full spread compositions, which would have given the readers a sense of the overall setting and made it a little more amusing.

Shubhra Seth

MY LITTLE BOOK OF HOLI
MY LITTLE BOOK OF DIWALI
Both by Ashwitha Jayakumar and Swarnavo Datta
Penguin/Random House India, 2024, pp. 22,
₹ 150.00 each



These board books are a colourful collection of picture cards which speak volumes in every page. *My Little Book of Holi* begins with making of colours with natural ingredients and children rushing to the market to buy them (illustrations: a boy on the wheelchair and *gullak*), the preparations for Holika Dahan with the pile of wood and water balloons and *pichkari* being kept ready: this builds up curiosity for the Puffin-size readers who would want to happily move on to the next page. The traditional festival food for Holi also finds mention which educates the young readers to the essential component of community eating and celebration in all festivals of India. With the advent of spring and splashing of colours the author navigates to the story behind this festival through shadow puppetry. The last two pages are like a little workbook for the enthusiastic readers to turn back the pages and locate the objects given. The



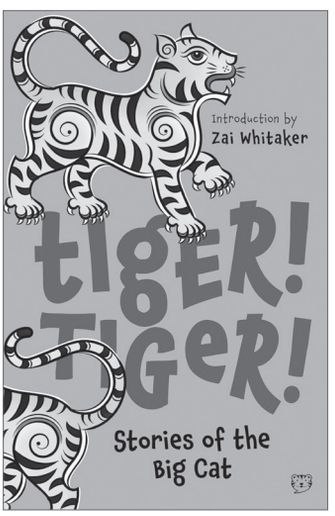
illustrations deserve a special mention here for their sensitive portrayal of diverse groups of people across all age groups, and the inclusion of pets in the celebrations. The introduction of the young readers to the story of Prahlada, King Hiranayakashipu and Holika through shadow puppets is warmly appreciated. The pictographic presentation of the preparations prior to this festival including the making of traditional delights like the *gujiya* and *malpua* all help in creating a canvas called Holi in the reader's mind which she shall replay as winter gives way to spring.

My Little Book of Diwali the board book opens up with colourful and joyous preparations that include *diyas*, new clothes, flower decorations—each creating a happy moment for the kindergarten readers. A visit to the sweet shop, the culture of gifts exchange and the star cast of dry fruits on Diwali add up to the reader's observations at home during this festival and also teaches long-practiced rituals and traditions. The two pages which have eleven windows each showing a pre-Diwali preparation is an impressive collection of drawings that give the young readers a panoramic view of all the activities around this festival. Description of all the five days beginning with Dhanteras, then Chhoti Diwali, followed by the celebrated festival of Diwali, then the Govardhan Puja and concluding with Bhai Dooj, familiarize the readers with the week-long rituals and customs. The story of Ramayana narrated through a series of shadow puppets and explained in simple words present the epic for the Puffin readers to enjoy and absorb. The activity page at the end of the board book is a fun exercise where the young readers will travel back in the pages and look for given items.

Swarnavo Datta's illustrations deserve a special mention here where every page speaks of inclusivity, taking the young and old together, the able-bodied and the differently abled, and the animals and birds. The poster for the missing cat, the month of November on the calendar, environment friendly Diwali, and presenting each of the five days of festivity with just one picture each is deeply appreciated. The story telling in simple minimal words while allowing pictures to speak volumes, make both these board books important tools of learning through observation and little exercises which are hidden in every page.

Lakshmi Karunakaran

TIGER! TIGER! STORIES OF THE BIG CAT
By various authors. Introduction by Zai Whitaker
Talking Cub, Speaking Tiger Books, 2024, pp. 230, ₹ 399.00



Tiger! Tiger! Stories of the Big Cat by various writers is an anthology of written works around the most celebrated and revered animal in the subcontinent–the tiger. The anthology has an introduction by educator, writer and naturalist Zai Whitaker.

Before I started reading this book, I wondered how on earth does one start talking to a child about a Tiger. What story would create that one authentic experience of this fascinating animal whose name they say is derived from a Persian word meaning 'arrow'? An animal that's sharp as an arrow, moves like one, and maybe even strikes like one.

This book is a basket of stories and poems gathered over the years that brings together fascinating ways in which tigers have been captured by some of the most celebrated storytellers– those from the British era like Jim Corbett, William Blake and Dhan Gopal Mukhejee (with two stories) along with more contemporary ones like Ruskin Bond, Ranjit Lal, Aditi De, Valmik Thapar, Anjana Basu and so on. It includes poems by William Blake, Prathibha Nandakumar, James McIntyre and Ella Wheeler Wilcox. About half of the stories and poems in the collection have been published earlier.

In all these stories, the tiger plays an important role—a cub aspiring to be a man-eater in Ranjit Lal's 'I want to be a Man-eater', to a ferocious tiger stuck in a typhoon in a cattle eater's paradise in 'Tiger in a Typhoon' by Hugh Allen; Prathibha Nandakumar's mighty Tigress brings out her claw when asked a question and goes on to scratch her head! Protective Padmini who charges at the wildlife photographer in Valmik Thapar's story is sure to give shivers down your spine, Maharani Sunity Devi's story of the Bengalee police officer who is out to catch a murderer but has to first deal with a tiger, to the fascinating tales of education between mother and cubs in Dhan Gopal Mukherji's 'Drought Striken Land'– the stories capture the myriad relationships of the tiger/ress among themselves, with the forests, and most of all, us human beings. The tigers/esses in the stories come in

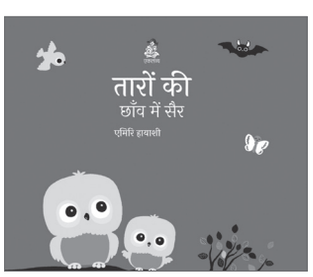
all flavours through folktales, fiction, non-fiction, and poems— they are scary, loveable, inspiring, reclusive, unpredictable, supernatural and mysterious; each story making you wonder what it might be like to encounter one in the wild.

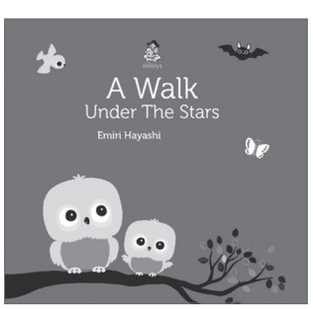
Why is a book like this important? As I write this review, forests fires have consumed millions of hectares of the Amazonian forests. Our own Western Ghats and Sundarbans are ecosystems where tigers and other wild animals' lives have been under grave threat. May this book be a small attempt to keep alive the stories of mighty beings from the forests and their centuries long relationship with us. As we turn the pages of books like these, may it remind us that we exist because of them.

Rashmi Paliwal

TAARON KI CHHANV MAIN SAIR (SLIDING BOARD BOOK)
By Emiri Hayashi. Translated from the original French to Hindi by Madhuri Tiwari
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 10, ₹ 300.00

A WALK UNDER THE STARS (SLIDING BOARD BOOK)
By Emiri Hayashi. Translated from the original French to English by Ranjitha Seshadri
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 10, ₹ 400.00





These books of ten pages each are sheer delight and marvel. In fact, they are much more. They are also works of art, showcasing printing excellence. The text in the books is the least noticeable element, which allows for the visual and tactile sensory aura to overpower the gaze. I did not even notice the titles of the books even as I used them with pre school children for several days.

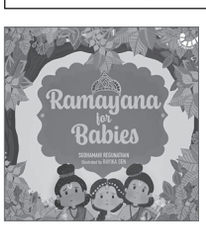
The books present the life of cats, mice, fishes, bees, fireflies, owls, birds, bats, dogs, rabbits, hedgehogs, snails, earthworms, caterpillars, bears, frogs, large mosquitoes, and ladybirds at night. I am surprised I could recognize so many creatures, most of them embedded unobtrusively in the scene, though some catch the eye immediately in each page. They exist in synchrony with the trees, leaves, branches, houses, doors, windows, roofs, tiles, chimneys, rising smoke, shrubs, ferns, grasses, fence poles, and a lane winding up to a cottage, carrying a car with headlights beaming and later the car with the lights off.

Apart from the setting of the scenes, the breathtaking use of just a few colours—purple, black, white and yellow—and an unbelievable use of silver in outlines as well as filling of the images raises an aura of quiet, stunning magic in each page. No image or its part is untouched by it. Nothing is left unattended, unadorned, un-celebrated. Every single little bit sings out its silent melody, which is heard as it is seen, becoming one unified stupefying mystical sensation.

But wait! There is a flutter… a possible swish… or a tick... because lights come on… sleepy eyes open wide… stars move across the sky… fishes go by the current… fireflies swarm up from the tree… the half-moon comes up high in the sky…and catches many an eye. It happens when I want it to happen…when I make it happen… I make things move…they move because of me… I feel the magic of my own power! The board of each page is skilfully designed to present smooth little pieces moving in and out of slits. Some pieces are elegantly pulled up from the slits; some pieces are effortlessly slid round and round and round in their slits, some are pushed up and down in their slits. It is a masterpiece of technique and design that enables such tactile processes flawlessly integrated in the scene, the setting, the design of each board page. This also makes the books irresistible for small children. I have seen them figure out the motions with ease and make the motions tirelessly to their unending delight. When I asked a child what she was doing, she said, '*game khel rahi hoon*' (I'm playing a game).

One must add a caveat here—that the tactile power overpowers most other possibilities the books present to children. At least, it seems so, to begin with. When the when the books are around around and available, when they return to it over time, when the charm of the tactile features may wear away, children and grown-ups will surely experience the endless wonders that the books bring to them.

Book News ***Book News***

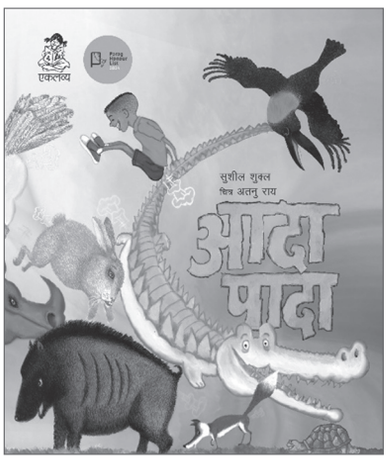


Ramayana for Babies by Sudhamahi Regunathan, illustrated by Rayika Sen, is a joyful tale of how the good always wins which is perfect for tiny hands and curious minds. Join Rama on an exciting adventure in the first ever Ramayana written exclusively for babies aged 18 months to five years.

Red Panda, an imprint of Westland Books, 2024, pp. 20, ₹ 350.00

Rohan

AADA PAADA
By Sushil Shukla. Illustrated by Atanu Roy
Eklavya Foundation, 2022, pp. 16, ₹ 60.00



As soon as you read the title of the book, you get the feeling that something fun and interesting is going to happen. In true sense, the poem lives up to these expectations. Word play while composing the poem, discovering and coining of new words, and while doing so, talking about an untouched topic with utmost ease are some things that are synonymous with Sushil Shukla's craft. This book showcases a similar magic.

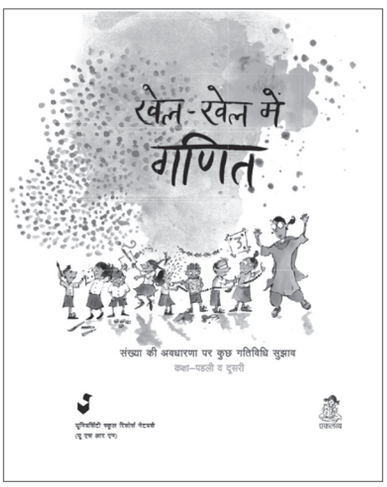
After a certain age, we have the freedom to talk about certain things, while certain others remain taboo. If, by mistake, we even mention these things, we are immediately made to keep quiet or are tagged as 'bad'. Menstruation and sex are some of such things which one is not allowed to talk about in any given situation. Farting, which is a common natural body function, is not permitted in public and talking about it is also accompanied by hesitation or shame/something to shy away from. Thus, this topic is opened up with a touch of humour. It has not been presented as a serious issue, but as a simple, fun poem.

Names and illustrations of various animals have been used just to increase the fun element. If one reads the poem with the expectation of teaching children about animals or that it will contain some researched scientific facts or information, then one is sure to be disappointed. This poem has been written on a funny topic with fun illustrations and for sheer enjoyment, so read and enjoy the poem and the illustrations of the book with this mindset.

The words create humour, but the illustrations make the joy twofold. Atanu, the illustrator, has not played much with colours. At first glance, they all look very ordinary, but the animals' mischievous facial expressions do full justice to the poem. The poem is meant for light-hearted reading and should be taken in that spirit.

Hriday Kant Dewan

KHEL KHEL MEIN GANIT
By various authors. Illustrated by Anita Balachandran
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 104, ₹ 170.00



Mathematics learning among students has long been a concern. Many students begin to fear mathematics early on, and failing to grasp foundational concepts, they avoid the subject altogether, often ending up disliking it. Fear of mathematics prevents them from engaging with it meaningfully, leading them to rely on memorizing shortcuts and formulas to arrive at answers without truly understanding the material. The way mathematics is typically taught—often abstract and disconnected from children's experiences—contributes to this issue. Although curricular and policy documents like the NCF 2005, NCF SE 2023, and various State government curriculum frameworks, along with some textbooks, encourage bringing students' contexts into the classroom and engaging them in activities and problem-solving, teachers often struggle to implement these approaches. They feel pressured to rush through the textbook to 'finish' the prescribed topics, which leaves them worried about the time available to teach concepts thoroughly. Teachers often lack both the time and strategies to address the diverse learning needs in their classrooms, particularly in mathematics, and they rarely find ways to connect school mathematics with the mathematics students encounter in their homes and daily lives.

The book *Khel Khel Mein Ganit*, authored by a group of experts in mathematics education, published by Eklavya and illustrated by Anita Balachandran, addresses many of these challenges and offers much more. The book's initial pages provide readers with valuable insights into what a meaningful mathematics classroom might look like for children. It identifies a lack of comprehension and the absence of play with mathematical objects as key factors contributing to students' disinterest and failure in learning mathematics. To address this, the book suggests starting children on their mathematical journey with concrete materials and a rich language environment that is related to mathematical ideas and objects. Discussing mathematical concepts and

relating them to concrete representations helps learners see connections and understand the logic behind algorithms, thereby internalizing concepts. The NCF SE 2023 also acknowledges the prevalent fear of mathematics, stating, 'Countering this fear of mathematics would require a shift in teaching-learning methods towards play-based, activity-based, discovery-based, and discussion-based learning' (p. 79).

In answering the question of what activity-based learning entails, the book suggests that it is a cornerstone of effective teaching and learning, making the classroom an interesting place for students. Key aspects of mathematical learning activities highlighted in the book include engaging with mathematical ideas in small groups, pairs, with the entire class, and individually. Each mode of engagement involves different types of effort and learning. The book provides examples of activities where teachers encourage learners to think critically and tackle new types of problems generated in the classroom.

To support teachers, the book offers examples of mathematical activities and games that ensure both enjoyment and learning. These activities enable teachers and learners to link various aspects of mathematical understanding, particularly in understanding numbers. The activities in the book allow children to explore number concepts using concrete materials and pictures, which serve as temporary representations to scaffold learning. Additionally, the book suggests that teachers engage children in conversations around these concepts to build deeper understanding. These conversations should be inclusive, involve everyone, and provide multiple opportunities for children to express their understanding, problem-solving methods, and ideas.

The book includes an activity chart that visually depicts the elements of an activity, such as its purpose, method of presentation, participation requirements, and the roles of both children and teachers. It emphasizes the teacher's role in being alert, ready to adapt the activity if needed, and the importance of assessment and planning. However, the book also makes it clear that an activity or worksheet is merely a step in helping children grasp a concept.

The variety of activities presented in the book demonstrates the different frameworks and approaches a teacher can use to ensure engagement and participation, while also providing opportunities for students to reflect and solve multiple problems at their own learning levels. The flexibility in these activities allows teachers to modify them based on their classroom's needs and what they want students to practice.

The book focuses on the concept of numbers, and the concept map at the beginning helps teachers visualize the development of a teaching programme for number concepts. It also highlights the importance of developing similar structures for other mathematical concepts.

Although the book is geared toward beginners learning mathematics, and can be used in kindergarten and first grade, the ideas and principles it discusses are relevant for teaching other concepts and for use in higher grades. The framework of activities and concept maps designed for numbers can serve as a model for adopting similar engaging approaches in other areas of mathematics.

Bansi

TUMNE MERA ANDAA TO NAHI DEKHA?
Adapted by Eklavya's Bal Gatividhi Karyakram. Illustrations and Design by Kanak Shashi
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 16, ₹ 280.00

Aren't some stories and pictures more appealing when shared and bigger?! It can't be truer for *Tumne Mera….* A big book! In bold black and red, the cover instantly grabbed me. The image of Mama Hen announced the question, '*Tumne Mera Andaa to Nahi Dekha?*', while she and the chick, who seems to have just emerged from the egg, look at each other… What a tender moment! Even though I've known this story for quite some time now (the Hindi book is in its 19th reprint), the Big Book was like a treasure chest!

This heartwarming story, adapted from a Russian tale during Eklavya's *Bal Gatividhi Karyakram*, has a trail of something people across age and context can relate with– lost and found! Mama Hen loses her egg. Anxious and agitated, she searches for it, spread by spread, asking the characters, '*Tumne mera andaa to nahi dekha*?' (Have you seen my egg?). Each character leads her to the next place where the egg rolled off to. Finally, she finds it… but the egg is no more! The heightened suspense ends in tenderly breaking the fourth wall, asking children– '*Kya tum bhi khush ho*?' (Are you happy, too?).

There is so much to see everywhere! The spreads are detailed with uniquely portrayed characters. Some were playing a sitar, some painting eggs, or sipping tea. Simple forms with bold lines and textures give a rugged warmth, inviting one to linger on the pages. The richness of texture

is brilliantly balanced by the simplicity of red, black and negative space. Across 12x17 inch pages, Kanak Shashi's craftsmanship holds the viewer and draws the eyes from one end to another–in the sequence in which mama hen moves! This is where the BIG of the Big Book dawned on me…

Big Books are aimed for early reading, where children transition from oral language to the written world with the help of an adult (kind of like bedtime-stories, but in groups). There is so much more to unearth with Big Books but to pick a few: this kind of use calls for a story kids would like to read and re-read, simple text, and repetition/pattern which allows kids to anticipate the phrases or words. In addition to these, I believe that the visibility due to colours and text in white background, strength of 350 gsm matt art paper and accessibility at ₹ 280 may allow the story to claim space as a beloved Big Book too!

Anil Singh

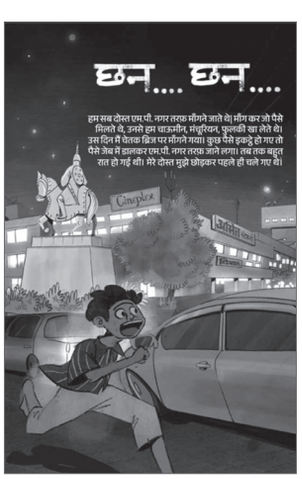
CHHAN... CHHAN...
By Krishna Uikey. Illustrated by Gagan Holkar
Muskaan, 2024, pp. 8, ₹ 15.00

AMMI KHO GAYI?
By Bushra Khan. Illustrated by Swarangi Sawant
Muskaan, 2024, pp. 8, ₹ 15.00

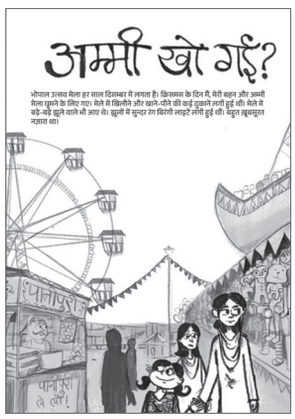
MERA BACHPAN
By Genius Pawar. Illustrated by Swarangi Sawant
Muskaan, 2024, pp. 8, ₹ 15.00

PYAARI SANA
By Bhanuraj. Illustrated by Ubitha Leela Unni
Muskaan, 2024, pp. 8, ₹ 12.00

Muskaan is an emerging publications group that has been encouraging creative and original writing alongside greater verbal expression amongst the children they work with and has also taken up the responsibility of publishing it. So far, within the *Padho Rakho Shrinkhala,* Muskaan has published 29 stories. All the books in this series are composed of the experiences and stories of children's lives. The writers of the stories, too, are children of various ages. These four small stories have been added to the *Padho Rakho Shrinkhala*, published by Muskaan.



Of the four stories under review, there is *Chhan… Chhan…*, written by Krishna Uikey, which puts forth the voice of children who beg to earn and live with abandon. Even within the difficult circumstances of their life, stories like this are a testament to the zest for a life lived with happiness and courage; they are not dependent on anyone.



Running beside the railway track late at night, followed by the sound of '*Chhan Chhan*', convinced that a ghost was chasing him, a child still manages to run across and win over his fear. This story demonstrates the strength of fighting one's fears along with someone. Gagan Holkar's black and white illustrations depict the world clearly through a child's eye without beating around the bush. These illustrations add life to the stories.

The second story is Bushra Khan's *Ammi Kho Gayi*? The *mela* (fair) holds different meanings and perspectives for everyone. Bushra writes about the experience of her Ammi getting lost in the *mela*. But the fantastic thing about this story is that after getting lost, Ammi, too, cries like a child. Swarangi Sawant has splendidly illustrated a close-up of the swing. When seen alongside Bushra's words in the text, '*Jab jhoola neeche aata, toh pet mein gudgudi si hoti*', the illustration truly leaves one feeling butterflies in one's stomach.

The third story has been written by Genius Pawar and is called *Mera Bachpan*. Every childhood is distinct and unique, but how one sees one's own childhood and what one would like to say about it is the most important. When Genius talks about going junk-sorting in his story, he doesn't miss adding that he used to go waste-picking as per a timetable. What does it mean to attach sorting junk with a timetable, this is something Genius and children like him understand well. Swarangi's illustrations in this,

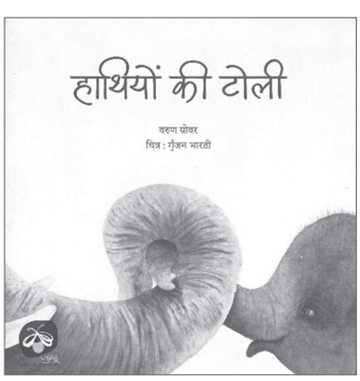
too, are lovely.

The fourth story, *Pyaari Sana*, is a small and beautiful story of affection and friendship. Bhanuraj, in this story, speaks of friendship and fondness that doesn't hide anything and has no façade to it. While being attached to and caring for his friend, Sana, Bhanuraj doesn't put any burden or expectations on her. In the story, Sana chooses to leave for home without telling him, but in that, too, Bhanuraj is not upset; rather, he shows a realistic and instinctive reaction, and in that, we see an understanding, hope and belief that he holds for his friend.

All these stories look at life closely and reflect that with honesty. The writers are children who are mature storytellers of the experiences of their lives. Their language, then, is the language of experiences. Their metaphors, images, and illustrations are also drawn from their experiences. In *Pyaari Sana*, the illustrator Ubitha Leela Unni has complemented and added to the story's language of images.

At the end of each of these stories from the *Padho Rakho Shrinkhala*, there are some exercises for learners progressing in language learning. These include focusing on specific sentences from the story, some discussion points for reflection, and some activities that the facilitator, in their classrooms or groups, could use to engage with these stories creatively.

HAATHIYON KI TOLI
By Varun Grover. Illustrated by Gunjan Bharti
Jugnoo Prakashan, an Imprint of Ektara Trust, pp. 10, ₹ 45.00



Haathiyon ki Toli is a deep and long story written in the form of a short poem. Long because though the words are limited, it says a lot more than just those few words. And deep because the expression in those few words take you to the depths of your own feelings and thoughts.

Varun Grover, who aligns phrases like 'Moon *ka gola*' and '*oon ka gola',* in this poem brings common facts about elephants to a level where you can feel and touch them. Beginning with the smallest elephant and going to the oldest, the way the poem tells us about them, you get a sense of the character and nature of the entire elephant community.

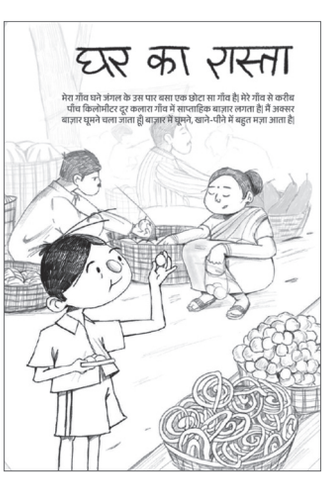
The lines of the poem create a visual world where the entire jungle, the herd of elephants, their relationship with each other, an unspoken social behaviour and deep sounds of sensitivity become visible. Along with this, the illustrations of Gunjan Bharti add such vibrance and magic of expression that their walking, their emotions, and the quiet murmurings of the elephants among themselves are almost audible. The illustration where the baby elephant sleeps on its mother's stomach with its trunk folded gives you a complete experience of the mother's hugeness and the baby's total carefreeness. This illustration of affection and trust is the soul of the book. Such vivid and impactful illustrations are rarely seen.

Touching the 170 gsm natural shaded papers, you will be able to feel the roughness of the elephants' skin, the hardness of the elephants' hair. The double-spread of the old elephant, with its wrinkled skin and half-open, moist, deep eyes, is so beautiful that you would want to pick up the book and add it to your collection, just for that illustration. It's a duet between a poem with a deep meaning and intense, deep illustrations.

An entire universe has been created within these eight lines.

Maya Maurya

GHAR KA RAASTA
By Indrasen Pawar. Illustrated by Gagan Holkar
Muskaan, 2024, pp. 8, ₹ 15.00



Children are often playful and innocent. It is also usually seen that children are very fearful of the pitch dark of night; or if something has hurt them or troubled them deeply, they don't forget such incidents and experiences easily. One of the favourite things children like to do is explore the weekly markets in their villages or cities. They want to go and roam, find exciting things to eat, new sights to see…

In this story, the weekly bazaar is five kilometres from the village, and the way is through a dense jungle. The route is difficult and even includes a river that can flood and the threat of wild animals, yet the child goes. It's even possible that going to the market or returning home from the market might cost one's life. The sellers and shopkeepers arrange their wares on the ground in the weekly market and try to wind up their sales before the

evening sets in.

In this journey of rushing back before the night falls, the child in this story gets stuck on his way. In these moments of dread, he thinks of his home and family; he wonders if his mother would be worried and looking out for him. He knows now that the only thing he can lean upon in this trying time is his own courage and spirit, and nothing will come of crying in this challenging time. He tries various things, racks his brain, and uses all his bravery to reach home somehow safe and sound. While reading this story, we see the highs and lows of real, lived experiences of children; we feel the worry and the fear as well as the ingenuity of solving one's problems, and we also witness the joy of wandering in a market by oneself. At the end of the story, the child runs into his mother's arms as he runs away from all the terror chasing him. The mother and child sit beside each other near the *chulha* and drink their *chai* as though they are happily celebrating the triumph of the child's bravery over his fears. In one of the illustrations at the story's start, one sees a beautiful image of the market and the child roaming and eating happily. In another illustration, the child's fear, loneliness, worry and restlessness are etched clearly on his face.

Sanjib Mukhopadhyay

PHORINGBABUR BIYE (ফড়িংবাবুর বিয়ে)
By Jogindranath Sarkar. Illustrated by Mayukh Ghosh
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 12, ₹ 45.00

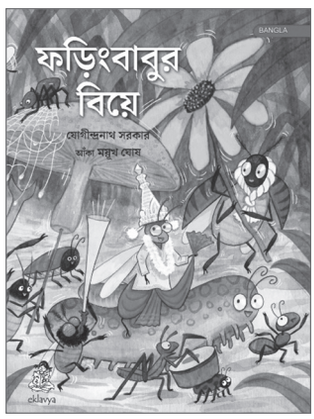
BRISTI (বৃষ্টি) (RAIN)
By Nandini Majumdar. Translated from the original English by Shuddha Banerjee. Illustrated by Rafia Bano
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 12, ₹ 50.00

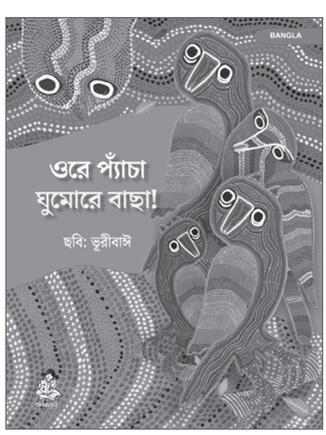
TIN BANDHU (তিন বন্ধু) (THREE FRIENDS)
Story and illustrations by Indu Harikumar. Translated from the original English by Baidehi Sengupta
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 24, ₹ 80.00

ORE PYANCHA GHUMORE BACHHA! (ওরে প্যাঁচা ঘুমোরে বাছা!) (SO JA ULLOO!)
Story and illustrations by Bhuribai. Translated from the original Hindi by Baidehi Sengupta
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 32, ₹ 100.00

BALTIR BHETOR SAMUDRO (বালতির ভেতর সমুদ্র) (THE SEA IN A BUCKET)
An Avehi-Abacus Story. Translated from the original English by Shuddha Banerjee. Illustrated by Deepa Balsavar
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 12, ₹ 100.00

Children are simple and beautiful, but children's literature is not easy to analyse. Children's literature began to prosper in Bangla from the middle of the nineteenth century. Jogindranath Sarkar (1866–1937) was one writer who had enriched Bengali children's literature. He was also known as Kedarnath, more commonly nicknamed 'Jogi', and became known simply as Jogindranath. The rhyme *Phoringbabur Biye* was first included in his original Bengali rhymes collection *Hasirasi* in 1899. For children, he gave gifts of nonsense funny rhymes outside of folklore. At the wedding of *Phoringbabu* (Grasshopper), there is a lot of noise all around, along with playing of drums. Tuni dances with a hat on, and a mouse dances shaking its pot belly! (টুনি নাচে টুপি এঁটে, / নংেটি ইঁদুর দামা পটেে হলেয়িে দুলয়িে!) This humorous tone and rhyme's alliteration make the children happy. It was a new imaginary world which combined the human world with the animal kingdom. In addition, Kolkata-based young artist Mayukh Ghosh's newly drawn colourful illustrations for this immortal creation in Bangla has won over children's hearts.





Varanasi-based writer and musician Nandini Majumdar's book *Bristi*, illustrated by young Zardozi embroidery artist Rafia Bano, has also been beautifully and carefully crafted. A child who is just starting to read or write gets a chance to be introduced to natural phenomena like rain through this book which is very light, and has creatively described the scientific

sequence. And the font size of the colourful stitched letters in this book is very attractive for children.

Fabric-lover and writer Indu Harikumar's book *Tin Bandhu (Three Friends)* has been made and illustrated on cloth using fabric paint and embroidery that introduces child readers to different colours in a beautiful way. Through the chemistry between three friends—Red, Yellow and Blue—the popular RYB colour model, she has shown wonderfully how two primary colours make another colour when mixed together (e.g. blue and yellow make green, red and blue make purple).

In the book *Ore Pyancha Ghumore Bachha!*, the sound of crow calling *ka-ka* or squirrel eating *kutur-kutur* or monkey jumping *khi-khi* echoes through various vowel sounds of A-AA-U-I. Such sounds make a clear impression about the animal in children's mind. The colourful illustrations by Bhuribai will help children visualize the animal's voice better. Incidentally, Bhuribai is a renowned Indian artist for the style of Bhil drawing.

Among the above mentioned four traditionally designed Bangla books, one is a classic written originally in Bengali, whereas the other three books have been well translated into Bengali. They are the outcome of four creative designers for first learners in 2024 through a collaboration of Eklavya and Bhabook foundation. The child reader generally likes to visualize the little sentences in action, sounds and images but also wants freedom to interpret the words.

Now consider the other book, *Baltir Bhetor Samudro*, an Avehi-Abacus story. Compared to the above books, this book is made for a little older reader, that is, 6-8 age group. In this story, a child named Sonu sets out with a bucket to fill water. With the help of a twist in his adventure, the water cycle is wonderfully introduced and explained by finding his search for the source of water in that bucket. I found one or two spelling errors while reading and felt that the flow of original Bengali sentences was somewhat better in some places in the main text and also the paratext. However, keeping in mind the content of this translated book, these nominal issues may not be judged important.

These days, the trend of the book market in India or West Bengal largely targets the middle-class urban children. But beyond this, the marginalized children of the society also need books which are low priced and which give them the fuel to think logically and develop their aesthetic sense. Eklavya has since long accepted this tough challenge very methodically and served it persistently. The use of various Indian and indigenous art forms in the books makes them accessible and attractive to children from different cultures. Even marginalized children should be able to relate the books with their life.

Semeen Ali

ASHA'S VOICE
By Mathangi Subramanian. Illustrated by Saheb Ram Tudu
Pratham Books, 2024, pp. 23, ₹ 85.00

WHAT'S MY MOTHER'S TONGUE?
By Abokali Jimomi. Illustrated by Canato Jimo
Pratham Books, 2023, pp. 11, ₹ 70.00

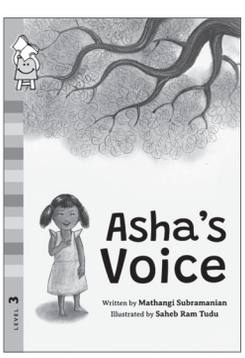
THE TORTOISESHELL BEETLE
By Yuvan Aves. Illustrated by Reshu Singh
Pratham Books, 2024, pp. 19, ₹ 80.00

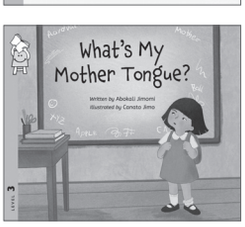
FORGETFUL DIDA
By Himanjali Sarkar. Illustrated by Aditi Anand
Pratham Books, 2024, pp. 19, ₹ 80.00

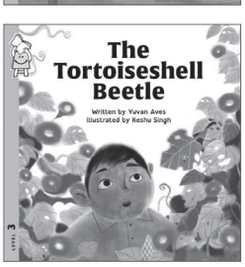
THE FREEDOM SISTERS
By Menaka Raman. Illustrated by Kruttika Susarla
Pratham Books, 2024, pp. 19, ₹ 85.00

SPACE RULES
By Aparna Kapur and Bijal Vachharajani. Photographs by NASA. Illustrated by Canato Jimo
Pratham Books, 2024, pp. 27, ₹ 95.00

AN ADVENTURE FOR PUCHKU
By Deepanjana Pal. Illustrated by Rajiv Eipe
Pratham Books, 2023, pp. 27, ₹ 95.00



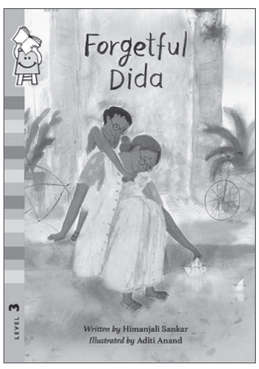


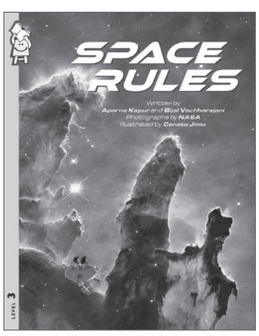


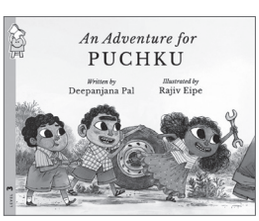
For children growing up in the 1990s and early 2000s, most accessible Indian literature came in the form of comics or magazines. Proper children's books were scarce in the market, especially in English, as many regional-language books were seldom translated for those unfamiliar with the original language. Few names stand out when reflecting on writers who created accessible children's literature across India in those times—Ruskin Bond, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, and Manjula Padmanabhan. However, if one were to think of writers from outside India, the list would be far longer. Why was there such a discrepancy? It is difficult to imagine today, given that India now has several publishing houses dedicated exclusively to children's literature. Their outreach is remarkable, crossing language barriers and publishing books in multiple languages to reach a wider audience.

One might ask why reading physical books remains important in the digital age, where content is easily available online. The answer lies in the immersive

experience of turning pages and diving into the imaginative worlds crafted by authors specifically for children. To truly appreciate this, one must see the world through a child's eyes rather than filtering everything through an adult perspective. Reading books tailored for children fosters empowerment, giving them the strength and confidence to connect with the characters or engage with the ideas presented. These stories often carry a level of awareness that might not otherwise be accessible to them.







'Asha may be small…
but her voice is very,
very big.'

Asha's Voice is a significant book that highlights the importance of children's voices in driving societal change. The story centres on a young girl named Asha, who, while unable to assist with household chores or adult responsibilities, has the gift of song. She uses her voice to help and diffuse tense situations, always having a song ready for any occasion. The book beautifully captures the power of creativity through her singing. Though Asha is too young to contribute to daily tasks, her mind is rich with ideas that she shares during the village meetings–ideas that benefit everyone. One of the book's key themes is its ability to bring people from different religions together, promoting respect for others regardless of their appearance or background. It also recognizes the value of contributions of all voices, no matter how young. The illustrations enhance the story, reflecting the serenity and calmness of the environment while aligning perfectly with the book's message. Visual representations play a crucial role in bringing the words to life, expanding a child's imagination by portraying scenarios in a vivid way. A particularly beautiful two-page spread shows the entire village coming together for a meeting, demonstrating the power of imagery in helping children grasp the message behind the words. Throughout this and other books reviewed here, the seamless blend of words and illustrations is a recurring strength. *Asha's Voice* inspires young readers to confidently share their unique ideas, reminding them not to shy away from contributing to the world around them.

The focus now shifts to another crucial theme gaining much-needed attention in adult literature and one that should rightly be introduced into children's literature: language and its connection to identity. Language is deeply intertwined with the social and cultural fabric, carrying ideas intrinsic to the people it represents. In the book *What's My Mother Tongue?*, we meet Zhevili, a young school girl with a beautiful Naga name, as she prepares for Language Day at school. The book educates readers about the diversity within the Naga language which comprises around 50 languages and dialects, many of which are listed as endangered by UNESCO. One of the key discussions in the story is when Zhevili's parents explain that the common language she speaks at school and in public is not her mother tongue. Instead, her mother tongue is the language spoken at home and passed down through generations, highlighting a significant dichotomy. At school, a shared language unites people from different cultures and backgrounds, but the language one is born into is equally important as it forms a core part of one's identity.

'"Oh Ipu, does that mean I am the only English person in my class?" asks Zhevili.

"No, Zhevili darling. You are not English," says Ipu.

"But I speak English at home," says Zhevili.

"Yes, you do. But you are Sümi Naga and your mother tongue is Sümi," says Ipu.'

The connection between language and cultural markers, like for instance through clothing, has been beautifully portrayed through the illustrations. These visuals help young readers understand and appreciate the differences between cultures while respecting the diversity that shapes our world. A striking two-page spread shows children dressed in various ethnic outfits, playing, running around, or admiring one another's clothes. The illustration emphasizes the beauty of diversity and highlights the important idea that no single language can define everyone. Instead, it is this rich variety that celebrates what it means to be an individual, with one's own unique set of ideas and cultural heritage. *What's My Mother Tongue?* encourages children to embrace the space they come from and appreciate their own cultural identity.

The concept of space also relates to creating room for individuals who might not conform to what society deems normal. This theme is sensitively and beautifully explored in *The Tortoiseshell Beetle*, which introduces readers to a young boy struggling to understand the words on the blackboard. The boy is dyslexic, though this is not explicitly stated in the book. Instead, the story uses a subtle yet powerful two-page illustration to depict his struggle. The image zooms in on his textbook, showing inverted words and numbers, along with a blunt pencil that the boy uses as an excuse for his difficulty in writing 'correctly'.

'Rohith tries hard to fix himself
with his small, blunt pencil
which won't stop inverting his letters.'

Society often teaches us, consciously or subconsciously, to judge those who deviate from the norms. This book sensitively guides young readers to understand and empathize with others who may be different, rather than rushing to judgment. The pressure children feel in a classroom setting is conveyed skilfully through both the text and illustrations. The role of a supportive teacher is integral here, as it emphasizes the importance of helping children accept themselves rather than forcing them to conform. The book celebrates the uniqueness of each child, as seen when the teacher takes the boy out into nature, where his keen observational skills shine. *The Tortoiseshell Beetle* conveys the message that every child is unique and cannot be confined to societal expectations. Education should nurture growth rather than suppress it, fostering sensitivity and celebrating the individual perceptions and ideas each child brings. The boy's happiness in nature highlights the need for spaces where children are free to express themselves and, more importantly, be themselves.

Echoing the theme of accepting people as they are, *Forgetful Dida* beautifully addresses the challenges of aging and memory loss, and how a child perceives and responds to these changes with sensitivity. The story revolves around the bond between a young boy and his grandmother. Through illustrations, we can infer that the boy's mother is a working woman, while the time the child spends with his grandmother is portrayed with great tenderness. The book sensitively depicts the grandmother's gradual memory loss, including moments where she even forgets words. One particularly touching image shows the grandmother returning home with her grandson, while the boy's mother hugs them both. Her face, a mix of concern and sadness, is juxtaposed with the child's puzzled expression as he looks up at her, highlighting the emotional complexity of the situation. The story gently introduces young readers to the reality of aging, emphasizing the patience required when caring for elderly loved ones. It conveys an important lesson: the grandmother's forgetfulness is not her fault but a natural part of aging. The book captures the sorrow of slowly losing a loved one while offering comfort through the child's innocent and hopeful perspective, reminding adults to see the world through a child's eyes.

'"So, what if she forgets us," I said.
"We will never forget her, Ma, will we?"'

Forgetful Dida balances the grief of watching a loved one fade with the reassurance that, despite memory loss, love and connection endure.

A child's perception opens a world of possibilities that adults often lose touch with over time. The cement of routine and conformity seeps into our minds, and it is through stories like *The Freedom Sisters* that we are reminded of the need to break free from these mental constraints. This book offers a breath of fresh air as it introduces us to Payoshni. The story begins with preparations for Independence Day, but Payo sits glumly, wanting to do something out of the ordinary, though unsure of what that might be. She approaches a local band, eager to play musical instruments, but is only given the simplest ones, reflecting how adults often stifle children's creativity by assigning them tasks deemed easy instead of letting them explore freely.

The story takes a turn when Payo is invited to join a group preparing for the following year's Independence Day celebrations. Here, we witness her experimenting with various materials, interacting with others, and fully engaging in group activities. This highlights the importance of fostering inclusivity in a child's creative and social development. Group activities play a crucial role in helping children grow, break out of their shells, and become part of a community. The book's vibrant illustrations beautifully highlight Payo's creativity and her ability to connect with others. The story culminates in a celebration where everyone displays their unique talents, which goes on to show that when children are given the freedom to explore their potential, they can achieve incredible things. *The Freedom Sisters* leaves readers with an inspiring message:

'Because they can.
Because they want to.
And because no one can
tell them otherwise.'

The actual vastness of space has been introduced to children in the captivating book, *Space Rules*. Featuring stunning NASA photographs on every page, the book blends awe-inspiring visuals with nuggets of wisdom for children to reflect on. It encourages children to take up as much space as they need to grow, reinforcing the idea that no thought or idea is too small to be shared. One of its messages is the importance of not harbouring ill will towards others, a lesson gently woven into the fabric of its space metaphors. A particularly striking image of a black hole is paired with the phrase: 'Never feed a black hole.' This seemingly simple sentence carries a deeper message–warning against being consumed by dark thoughts, which can pull one into an abyss of negativity. The book concludes with a detailed glossary, providing children with a brief insight into space-related terms, helping them grasp key concepts with ease.

Another standout book in this review is *An Adventure for Puchku*, one of my current favourites. It explores friendship, creativity, challenging stereotypes, and breaking free from patriarchal norms. The story opens with two children greeting each other by shouting from their homes; the breaking of barriers in a refreshingly unfiltered way. We are introduced to three

friends—Puchku, Boltu, and Dodla—who go for a car ride driven by Boltu's father. When rain pours down, it reveals the stark difference in how children and adults perceive it.

'"Look, Puchku," says Dodla. "The road has turned into dooffee."

"What is dooffee?" Puchku asks.

Boltu replies, "Doodh plus coffee, silly."'

As the car breaks down, the children think of creative ways to help everyone get home. They encounter a tea seller's daughter, Pankhuri, who offers to fix the car but is met with scepticism from Boltu's father.

'"I can help you fix the car," says the Didi with the *pakoda*.

"No, no, we need a real mechanic," says Uncle.'

This moment powerfully highlights the stereotypes attached to gender roles. The story takes an empowering turn when Pankhuri, who is revealed to be a firefighter, fixes the car despite the initial doubts. It is commendable how the book normalizes women in roles typically reserved for men, a perspective often missing from the books of previous generations for children. As Pankhuri fixes the car, the children eagerly bombard her with questions about her work and the car's mechanics, illustrating a world where curiosity and creativity thrive. The book's message is clear: children should feel free to ask questions, no matter how silly they may seem, and we must challenge outdated gender stereotypes.

Each of the books featured in this review strives to offer fresh perspectives on the concerns we tend to pass down to children. By addressing these issues in meaningful and imaginative ways, these books have achieved something remarkable–opening new possibilities for how children see and engage with the world around them.

Book News ***Book News***

Feathers, Fools and Farts by L. Somi Roy, Thangjam Hindustani Devi, with illustrations by Sapha Yumnam are ten wacky stories retold from Manipur, perched on India's border with Myanmar. If you try to copy the foolishness of the characters, animal and human, in these folktales, you just might turn into a tiger, get stung by a swarm of bees, or even get poo'ed on. If, however, you believe in strange romances, admire bravery, and like magic and sorcery, this book is for you, wherever you are.

Puffin Books, 2023, pp. 128, ₹ 399.00

Jane Sahi

KABULIWALLAH
By Rabindranath Tagore. Translated from the original Bengali by Arunava Sinha. Illustrated by Mohit Suneja
Aleph Book Company, 2024, pp. 40, ₹ 199.00

This edition of *Kabuliwallah* makes the story easily accessible to children because it is not buried in a volume of short stories in small print, but is highlighted as a single story in a book that has a colourful hardbound cover, with a well-spaced layout in a child-friendly print size. Happily, it has not been condensed or abridged but is presented in its full richness!

Tagore's short story seems particularly relevant at the present time when children are often growing up in an atmosphere of fear of the stranger and suspicion of the outsider. The story of *Kabuliwallah* celebrates unlikely friendships that cross the boundaries of age, ethnicity, language, religion and economic difference. Central to the story is the close relationship between the spontaneous five-year old child from a middle-class family in Calcutta and the generous spirited, itinerant vendor of dry fruits. Mini's curiosity overcomes her initial fears of the Pathan's alarming appearance and unfamiliar speech. Speaking in broken Bengali, Rahmat, the 'Kabuliwallah' wins her trust and they begin to joke and tease each other. The whole encounter is made possible under the watchful and sensitive eye of Mini's affectionate but liberal father.

There is also a growing respect between Mini's father who is an established, free-thinking writer and the wandering Kabuliwallah as they discover what they have in common as well as their differences. There is a tender moment towards the end of the story when Rahmat shows Mini's father his own child's handprint smeared with lampblack or soot on a crumpled piece of paper, which he has treasured all through his travels. Mini's father and Parbati's father, though under quite different circumstances, both realize the depth of affection and the pain of separation that can occur within families.

The story is set in times when there was relatively some freedom of movement across the Indian subcontinent, and before the days of the Citizenship Act of 1955 and its many amendments including the most recent one of 2019 where mobility becomes increasingly restricted. At the present time, migrant communities are in danger of being deported and their only 'crime' is their ancestral identity. The Afghani migrant of this story moves across borders freely and though suspected by some, forges bonds with others.

The story avoids any sentimentality as the shadow

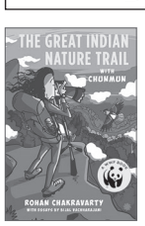
of suspicion and animosity towards the itinerant vendor surfaces when there is an altercation between him and a customer over some pending debt. Rahmat, indignant that he is being cheated, is provoked; he attacks the man and ends up in jail accused of assault. Many years later after his release, the 'Kabuliwallah' unexpectedly appears at the house of Mini on the day of her marriage and there is a tender exchange between the two fathers as they both recognize the inevitability of change.

Kabuliwallah was written and first published in 1892. Much later, in 1910 it was translated into English by the Irish teacher and writer, Margaret Noble, more widely known as Sister Nivedita. Subsequently, the story has been translated by Bengali, Bangladeshi and English authors including Mohammad A Quayum and William Radice. This particular edition has been done by the prominent translator Arunava Sinha who brings a freshness and crispness to the text that mostly would be well within the grasp of young teenagers but the story itself appeals across generations. Occasionally, the choice of words or turn of phrase do not seem to quite fit the tone of Tagore's writing, such as the term 'language diversity' (p. 8), or even at the conclusion of the story when the father as narrator says, 'for me, the festivities were brightened by the benediction of a father's love'. However, Anurava Sinha is clearly writing for an Indian audience and weaves Bengali words quite naturally into the text to make clear the context, thereby adding a distinctive flavour. Mini, for example, is endearingly addressed as '*khnokhi*', meaning little girl, by Rahmat, the Kabuliwallah.

The illustrations are somewhat uneven but many capture well the close relationship between the little girl and the Kabuliwallah. One striking image comes at the beginning and at the close of the book and shows Mini enveloped in the embrace of the burly Pathan and appears perfectly content in his company.

It is to be hoped that this attractive edition of such an iconic, classic story of friendship will reach a new generation of readers.

Book News *Book News*

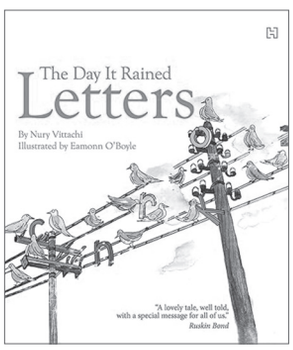


The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun by Rohan Chakravarty and Bijal Vachharajani is about eighteen-year-old Chunmun an avid bird watcher, like her super cool uncle Bikky who is an ornithologist. When she wins an explorer's grant from a wildlife magazine, her dream of going on an expedition across India finally comes true.

Juggernaut, 2024, pp. 112, ₹ 499.00

Rafia Reshi

THE DAY IT RAINED LETTERS
By Nury Vittachi. Illustrated by Eamonn O'Boyle
Hachette India, 2025, pp. 48, ₹ 399.00


The Day It Rained
Letters
By Nury Vittachi
Illustrated by Eamonn O'Boyle
"A lovely tale, well told, with a special message for all of us."
Ruskin Bond

Nury Vittachi's *The Day It Rained Letters*, with illustrations by Eamonn O'Boyle, is a delightful picture book that speaks directly to both—kids and their parents. In this story, we find ourselves in a land where storybooks are unheard of, leaving the townspeople without the wonder and excitement that books bring. Through the whimsical adventures of two endearing characters, Minky Binka and her friend Rama Khan, the book imparts a timeless message about the power of storytelling and the magic of books.

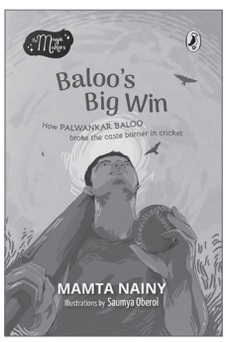
Their journey through town introduces Minky and Rama to the concept of books as 'mental meals' that you 'eat with your eyes', and storytelling as 'food for thought' that you 'eat with your ears'. As they discover the enchanting world of books, they learn that reading isn't just about looking at words on a page—it's about feeding your imagination and dreaming up amazing adventures. Their mentor, Mr. Reed, helps them understand that everyone has a 'dream machine' in their head, and books are the key to unlocking it. His encouragement helps them—and us—realize how powerful and creative our minds can be when we dive into a good story.

Eamonn O'Boyle's illustrations add a wonderful layer to the story, bringing the vibrant and whimsical world of Minky and Rama to life. The visuals perfectly capture the fun and wonder of their journey, making the book even more engaging and enjoyable.

This book isn't just a fun adventure for kids; it's also a gentle reminder for parents. It is more than just a picture book; it's a celebration of the power of stories and the importance of nurturing creativity. It's a reminder of how essential it is to make time for books in our lives and how they can open up a world of imagination for children and adults alike. In today's digital age, it's easy for screens and gadgets to take over our lives. *The Day It Rained Letters* encourages families to step away from the digital world and rediscover the simple joy of reading together. It shows how storybooks can spark imagination, creativity, and meaningful connections.

Kavita Tiwari

BALOO'S BIG WIN—HOW PALWANKAR BALOO BROKE THE CASTE BARRIER IN CRICKET
By Mamta Nainy. Illustrated by Saumya Oberoi
Puffin books, 2024, pp. 40, ₹ 250.00



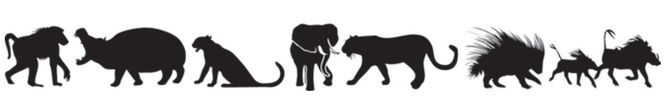
Baloo's Big Win is an inspiring biography that sheds light on the remarkable journey of Palwankar Baloo, India's first Dalit cricketer. Set in pre-Independence India, a time when caste discrimination was deeply ingrained, the book takes readers through Baloo's childhood, his love for cricket, and his persistent struggle to break caste barriers.

One of the most powerful parts of the book is how it shows Baloo's inner struggles. He often questions the unfairness he faces because of his caste and the untouchability rules of that time. This story not only helps young readers understand the harsh reality of the caste system but also shows Baloo's strength and bravery in overcoming these social barriers.

The story triggered a personal memory for me as well. I recall, as a child of around 8 or 9, accidentally entering a temple near our colony. Later, I was scolded by my mother and aunt for visiting a place located in a Mehtar (sweeper) colony, and I was told to take a bath before entering the house. The questions that swirled in my mind then—how a temple could belong to a specific caste, and how I could be considered impure simply by being there—are similar to the ones Baloo wrestles with in the book.

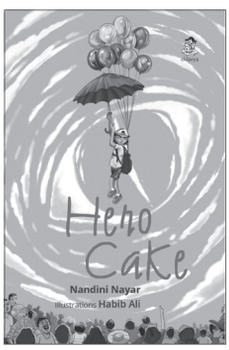
The theme also brings to mind the movie *Lagaan*, where a Dalit player faces similar challenges. Saumya Oberoi's illustrations beautifully complement the narrative, drawing attention to the fine details—whether it is the depiction of Baloo's home, the upper-caste Wadi, the emotions etched on the faces of the characters, or the different bowling actions of Baloo. Each illustration adds depth to the story, helping readers visualize the challenges Baloo faces and the world he inhabits.

Overall, *Baloo's Big Win* is a powerful tale of perseverance, passion, and social change. It not only emphasizes the importance of following one's dreams but also addresses a critical social issue that remains relevant today. This book is bound to inspire young readers to chase their aspirations, while also encouraging them to think critically about caste-based discrimination in India.



Maheen Mirza

HERO CAKE
By Nandini Nayar. Illustrated by Habib Ali
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 88, ₹ 110.00



Hero Cake by Nandini Nayar is a captivating children's book that redefines heroism. The story follows Abhi, a determined young child who enters the King's Hero Hunt competition. Despite the competition being dominated by 'tall, huge, shiningly-oiled men', Abhi's participation sets the stage for a delightful adventure filled with humour, ingenuity and heartwarming moments.

The story takes place in a world mirroring our own, allowing for elements of sci-fi and fantasy to be incorporated. The storyline of an unlikely hero overcoming formidable odds is a familiar theme in children's literature, and Nayar skilfully builds tension and excitement around the Hero Hunt. Abhi's fearless attitude and inventive problem-solving skills create an engaging protagonist, highlighting that heroism is not limited to physical strength but encompasses determination, creativity, and strength of character. This challenges the normative traditional ideals of heroism and offers a more inclusive and representative model for readers to relate to.

An interesting element that adds depth to the plot is Abhi's refusal to be confined by societal expectations. This is reinforced through the supporting characters of the Queen, the parents, and the sibling, who play integral roles in driving the story forward. The character of the Queen, in particular, evolves from being portrayed as passive to a supportive and insightful character who challenges the King's traditional views.

Nayar's writing is simple yet captivating. She uses accessible language, allowing children to easily follow along while introducing them to new vocabulary. The narrative flows swiftly from one event to the next. However, the fast pace sometimes leaves little room for deeper exploration of Abhi's character. For example, there is minimal internal conflict or emotional growth depicted in Abhi's transition from a determined child to the town's hero. Delving into this aspect could have been especially relevant for children who observe or personally experience struggles to fit in or challenge stereotypes.

Nayar refrains from assigning a specific gender to the children in the story, allowing readers to assume it. This creates space for the fluidity of identity and self-definition beyond societal labels. It also sets the stage

for re-examination of traditional archetypes assumed by the reader. The story focuses on breaking barriers and refusing to be confined by others' expectations, reflecting the struggle for recognition and acceptance in a world that often marginalizes those who do not fit within its norms. The climax of the story, where Abhi insists on being addressed by the name they prefer, is again a moment of self-assertion and identity, underscoring the importance of respecting individual identity and choices.

The illustrations by Habib Ali add charm to the book, perfectly complementing the narrative. The artwork captures the emotions and actions of the characters in a way that young readers can understand and appreciate, enhancing the story's visual appeal and helping readers connect with the characters.

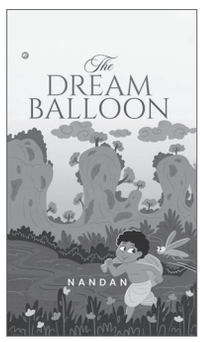
The Hero Cake as a prize, initially presented as a mysterious reward, ends up being somewhat unconvincing. While this twist adds surprise, it may not fully satisfy readers who were expecting a more symbolic conclusion, especially in light of the uplifting identity revelation that precedes the end.

Overall, *Hero Cake* is a worthwhile addition to any child's bookshelf with its engaging and affirming content. Nandini Nayar and Habib Ali have created a story that is both entertaining and educational, with a message that resonates with children and adults alike. It celebrates individuality, challenges norms, and offers a vision of heroism that is as diverse as its readers. It is a book that encourages young readers to dream big, be brave, and never underestimate their abilities.

Parag, an initiative of the Tata Trusts, has been invited to be a partner for the India chapter of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY).The Parag initiative, since its inception in 2005, has been dedicated to fostering reading habits and promoting literature amongst children and young adults in India. IBBY, a non-governmental organization accredited by UNESCO, plays a key role as an advocate for children's literature and supports a global network of members from 84 countries, aimed towards bringing books and children together. This partnership will build on Parag's extensive network of key players and is uniquely positioned to transform the children's literature landscape in India.

Divya Shankar

THE DREAM BALLOON
By Nandan
Orange Books Publication, 2024, pp. 156, ₹ 300.00



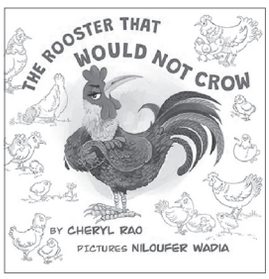
From Eleanor Roosevelt to APJ Abdul Kalam, from Oscar Wilde, Edgar Allen Poe to Terry Pratchett, many eminent personalities have quoted 'quotable' lines on dreams. Nearly everyday, we wish our loved ones good night and sweet dreams at bedtime. So a country where dreams evade its residents despite everything being available in abundance, definitely sounds miserable. It is here that Rajakumaran, a young boy and the book's protagonist, lives with his father who is a farmer and little brother, Kannan. Unable to talk to their dead mother who regularly visited him in his dreams, Kannan is woebegone. The dreams suddenly disappearing from their land forces the king to declare an emergency. The Rajaguru performs a few rituals and shares his insights that only a prince can save the land from the ordeal by defeating a giant who had seized all their dreams, who lived in a fort atop a hill in a faraway land. But when the king didn't have issues of his own, where would a prince come from? Rajakumaran, whose name means prince, assumes charge and promises to retrieve their land's lost dreams and restore normalcy.

And thus begins an exciting adventure that Rajakumaran embarks upon, resulting in a magical fable-like tale where virtues win despite many hardships, a celebration of friendship, kindness, honesty and bravery. A talking grasshopper who is looking for his missing friend and a sad tortoise whose island has suddenly turned uninhabitable join Rajakumaran on his expedition, hoping to find answers to their problems. The trio share a beautiful bond. In Rajakumaran, the author gives the young readers an adorable boy who trusts his instincts, stays true to his word, listens keenly to advice of elders and fights self-doubt. His affection for his little brother Kannan, be it in getting him sweets or resolving to go on a dangerous mission so that Kannan and others can get back their dreams, is heartwarming.

The storytelling and illustrations are simple and straightforward. The language even feels rudimentary at places, lacking polish. Nevertheless, the talking animals, an old woman who turns cunning humans into parrots, a powerful sword that should be removed from its sheath only once, the giant's fort with chambers full of butterflies and beetles—all add an element of magic and thrill. Overall, an enjoyable and imaginative read!

Deepali Shukla

THE ROOSTER THAT WOULD NOT CROW
By Cheryl Rao. Illustrated by Niloufer Wadia
Tulika Books, Chennai, 2024, pp. 24, ₹ 195.00



Children's literature is making constant efforts to write stories about issues that are considered a little difficult to write about. This book is one of those attempts. While holding this book in my hands, I remembered another story in which the rooster stopped crowing. In just a few words and with a beautiful rhythm, Cheryl Rao has woven together a profound issue of identity. In the same way as society assigns an identity and expectation to humans, it also imposes certain traits on animals based on their gender.

The positive aspect of this story is that the individuals who raise the rooster accept its gender and behaviour. Children's reaction to it provides many opportunities to discuss this story with them. Accepting someone as they are is a challenge, but it's not impossible. Niloufer Wadia's illustrations facilitate understanding of the story. The expressions of the people in the pictures have been beautifully captured. The distant sound of the rooster's *kuckroo-kuckroo-koo* can be heard in the picture.

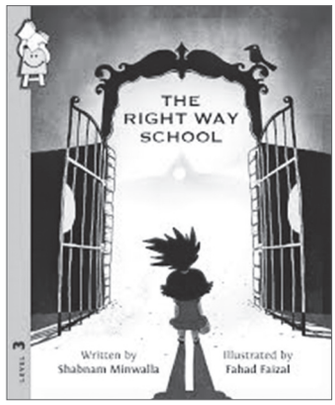
One wonders why some parts of the illustrations are in black and white. There are multiple ways to think about it: it could be from the perspective of focusing on the character; or, it could be to highlight one's identity; or again, there could be other interpretations.

Sonam Kumari

THE RIGHT WAY SCHOOL
By Shabnam Minwalla. Illustrated by Fahad Faizal
Pratham Books, pp. 20 (e-book), pp. 13 (in print), ₹ 85.00

When I read the name of the book for the first time, I was intrigued by the question of what could be the possible right ways of the school in this book. Would it cater to a different kind of school as a space where my deep-seated insecurities and fear will be uprooted, or will it re-establish the same old institution?

In a normative world, school is often seen as a place designed to produce disciplined individuals who conform to societal norms and rules. It also becomes a tool to reinforce the hierarchical structures present outside of the institution. Discipline is strictly maintained to prevent any disruptions to the established social order, and punishments are enforced for violations. Shabnam Minwalla's book, *The Right Way School*, explores a similar idea about a school where students are required to do everything in a precise and 'correct' way. While schools are intended to be places for learning and curiosity, students are continuously discouraged from asking questions because questioning is deemed inappropriate.



In this story, Mrs. Gambhir, a teacher, is obsessed with doing things perfectly. She insists on the 'right way' of standing, speaking, reading, writing, and every other thing. According to her, the right way of learning happens only when students unquestioningly follow what she writes on the board, without any cross questioning. If anyone dares to question her in between, then she makes a sound of *'tchhhhht'* and frightens the students. She uses silent treatment and intimidation to control the students. Fear of her overpowers everyone until one day a new student, Laila, joins the class and shakes up Mrs. Gambhir's rigid methods. Laila, with her vibrant clothes and insatiable curiosity, disrupts the school's rigid atmosphere. Despite being punished for her flamboyant and creative behaviour, she doesn't contain her curiosity within a box, rather motivates the entire class to question the way she does. The story leaves readers wondering how the students' rebellion impacts Mrs. Gambhir and the rules of The Right Way School.

The illustrations by Fahad Faizal add another layer to the narrative, vividly bringing the story to life. The gray colour palette reflects the oppressive atmosphere of fear and dullness in the school, which is sharply contrasted by the bright colours that appear when Laila enters the scene. Though the vibrancy is eventually subdued, the illustrations effectively complement the tone and mood of the story.

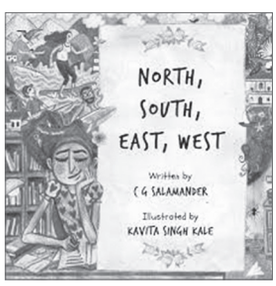
The book raises important questions about school norms, fear, and discipline. It emphasizes the value of curiosity and could serve as a useful resource not only for children but also for teachers, reminding and reinforcing the value that schools should encourage dialogue and curiosity rather than fostering silence and fear.

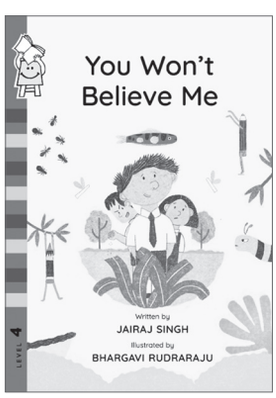
Dhruva Desai

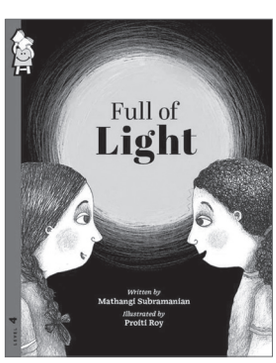
NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST
By CG Salamander. Illustrated by Kavita Singh Kale
Pratham Books, 2023, pp. 24, ₹ 85.00

YOU WON'T BELIEVE ME
By Jairaj Singh. Illustrated by Bhargavi Rudraraju
Pratham Books, 2023, pp. 28, ₹ 90.00

FULL OF LIGHT
By Mathangi Subramanian. Illustrated by Proiti Roy
Pratham Books, 2023, ₹ 85.00







In this review, I will be talking about three Pratham books published in 2023— *North, South, East, West*; *You Won't Believe Me;* and *Full of Light*. Pratham books has a 4-tiered reading scale and these are all Level 4 books, i.e., 'for older children who can read with confidence'. Broadly, I would agree with that categorizing, though in our country, levelling uniformly is always difficult. These three books are all at different levels in terms of the number of words per page and the complexity of the language used (with *Full of Light* perhaps at a more advanced level, and *You Won't Believe Me* at a more accessible one), and so would not all be equally accessible to every independent reader. I would add that all of these stories can be read aloud to younger children as well, who, with the help of a teacher/ librarian/parent, would certainly be able to engage meaningfully with the story.

All of these books are priced at or under Rs. 90, which is very affordable for picture books, especially books such as these with high-quality printing. This ties into and furthers Pratham's goal of 'a book in every child's hand'.

North, South, East, West, a charming and educational story, is told in the form of postcards and letters sent by the travelling Shaana to her classmates back home. We go with Shaana and her parents over a five-month journey across India, introducing us to Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, Goa, all the way back to Tamil Nadu and Shaana's hometown of (perhaps?) Rameshwaram. The story is narrated in a quirky and amusing manner, but the gentle reminders from Shaana's parents about how much things have changed (due to climate change) are very necessary, and elevate this book beyond simply a young person's travelogue. The illustrations by Kavita Singh Kale are brilliant and add so much to each page, and each geography we encounter—little tidbits that aren't mentioned in the text come out beautifully in the full-page illustrations; the Sundarbans and Goa were personal favourites. It would have been nice to see a page about Rameshwaram/Pamban island, the place we can infer Shaana lives in. However, the combination of the last two letters and the illustrations did make me do some further research on my own, and hopefully, that will be true for many other readers as well.

Sometimes, you may like school, even when the school doesn't seem to like you back. This is the case for the narrator of our story, *You Won't Believe Me*— a child who is bullied and neglected by his peers and the school he goes to. This is a child who does not fit our ideas of a 'good' or 'normal' child—they aren't great at their studies (in fact, it is indicated that perhaps they have a learning disability), and something about them seems to set off the other children in the school. They are bullied, attacked, scolded, and made fun of. Despite all of this, they share with us what they love about the school—and one of the things they love the most is the fish pond in the school, where they closely observe and get to know many of the fish. This is quite a heartbreaking story, cruelly and honestly depicting the experience of a child who does not 'fit in'. There are positive notes in the child's experience, and it ends on a note of—not quite hope—but of acknowledgement and realization. The illustrations by Bhargavi Rudraraju simply and skilfully depict the narrator's thoughts and experiences with clever use of colour amongst the grey experience of school and the classroom.

This is an important book for children to read, to perhaps start to understand that not all of us are the same, and that sometimes some of us cannot confidently express ourselves.

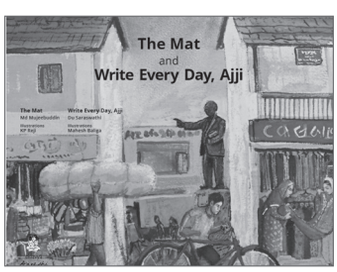
Picture books and children's literature often portray everything positively, though we all know that not all of the experiences in a child's life are good ones. It's rare that we get to see a book that actively engages with the experience of unkind parenting—or a bad relationship between parent and child. In *Full of Light* Mathangi Subramanian tells the sad and, for many of us, the all-too-relatable story of young Shakthi, who cannot do anything 'right' in the eyes of her mother. She's 'always so loud', and 'can't… stay clean for five minutes', and 'struggles with marks'. Even winning an award at an art competition

garners no praise. We see how such experiences can start to poison our mindsets and lead to not only low self-esteem but also a desire to hurt other people in turn.

However, Shakthi's neighbour Tejas has some advice for her, and with Tejas' help, Shakthi is able to get to know herself a little bit better and prevent the darkness from getting back in. Adding to the author's ongoing metaphor of light and darkness, Proiti Roy's illustrations brilliantly depict Shakthi's feelings, both the sad and the happy. As she experiences this transformational journey and as Shakthi's estimation of herself changes, more and more colour enters the pages. The book avoids the common pitfall of unrealistic redemption of a negatively portrayed character, however it still ends on an uplifting note of hope and positivity—perhaps reminding some of us of our good parts and that we can also shine.

Anjali Noronha

THE MAT
By Md Mujeebuddin
WRITE EVERY DAY, AJJI
By Du Saraswathi. Illustrated by KP Reji and Mahesh Baliga
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 24, ₹ 115.00



This is a new book in Anveshi's series based on the lives of hitherto marginalized communities. It is a book with two stories. The first, 'The Mat' is based on events in a young Muslim boy's life, and the other, 'Write Every Day, Ajji', is set in a Dalit community. They both show a relationship between children and elderly women. Yet they are very different both in style and context. What is significant is that they are both written by members of the same community. They are both, so to say, insider narratives, another hallmark of all of the Anveshi series. Unfortunately, they do not have an author's bio, which is very important in a series like this.

It is not often that one comes across stories for children set in the ambience of Muslim culture. Premchand's *Idgah* still remains a classic for its sensitive rendering of what the most celebrated Muslim festival meant for a poor Muslim child and his grandmother. The difference is that while very sensitive to social nuances, Premchand was an outsider to the community he was writing about.

'The Mat' is a lovely story, beautifully rendered from start to finish by Md. Mujeebuddin, a young Muslim teacher and researcher, who has researched the problems of Muslim students in higher education.

The beginning just about sets the context without too much unnecessary detail, and young readers do not have to wait for the first important event of the story, which is on the first page itself. We do not get to know the names of the protagonist or the characters of the story—only just the relevant information to establish their identity, while keeping it open for the reader. As the story unfolds, an old lady who is called 'Khala' (aunt in Urdu), comes into the picture followed by the Muezzin and Imam. Their personalities are revealed through their attitude to the happenings of the story. Interestingly, the boy's parents don't figure in the story except for a brief mention when they are also blamed for the boy's action.

The story revolves around a mat that the boy gets for the khala, as the title reveals, and the news of a death. The plot of the story lies in the attitude of people to such objects, the fear of the revelation of its somewhat taboo nature, as well as public fear of death and its announcement.

It is a very realistic story, lucid in language and content, with just the right amount of complexity for young middle-school readers. It will also help young readers to connect with social context they may not be part of. The story provides enough context clues for them to make sense of the story.

Written by Du Saraswathi, a Dalit feminist writer and theatre artist, 'Write Every Day, Ajji' is a story about a family of any children going to their grandmother's village for a feast. It is set in a context not very common in Indian children's books–probably of a village in Karnataka, near Bangalore. That the hamlet is one of a lower caste is revealed only by the word '*kelagatti*' right at the end of the book. When decoded in Kannada– '*kela*' means low and '*gatti*' means area–it translates to 'an area of the low', which comes after that of the Brahmin, Usethe Gowda and the Potter.

The story begins with a grandmother writing to her children in Bangalore to come to the village for a festival and bring some things for it. Such a beginning is novel and coming from a Dalit writer, it is perhaps an assertion of the access a Dalit family has to hitherto forbidden literacy practices. The striking feature is the eagerness with which the children look forward and enjoy the visit to their grandmother and the affection of the grandmother.

The festival the story is set in is however, not a very common one, and just naming it 'Kalgattama's feast' is not enough for the common reader to know when such a festival takes place and what it signifies. While it is laudable that Dalit lives are coming to light through such stories, the style is heavy and inaccessible—a lot of unnecessary details like the names of 24 grandchildren or

the names of nine stations are mentioned, none of which help one bit.

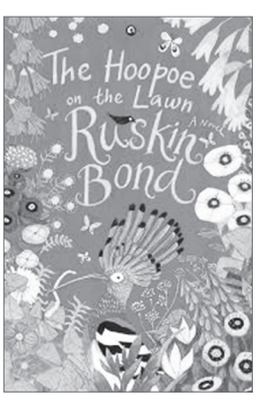
The story is largely the recording of a trip, the preparations for the feast, and about the food. Many words and names from Kannada are used but there is not enough context to be able to make sense of them, which is crucial for accessibility to the wider public. This could be improved in the future rendering of the story.

In both stories, the illustrations do not add anything much. In two instances, they even contradict the description–in the first story, the boy is described as having the *sheer* standing but is shown sitting on the mat; candles are shown instead of the clay *diyas* as described in the text.

Despite its weaknesses, this book and the whole Anveshi set is a must have for middle-school children.

Shivani Bajaj

THE HOOPOE ON THE LAWN: A NOVEL
By Ruskin Bond. Illustrated by Priya Kuriyan
Aleph Book Company, 2024, pp. 60, ₹ 399.00



The book, written by the all-time favourite children's writer, Ruskin Bond, reminisces on a particular winter vacation that he spent as a young boy of eleven at his grandmother's house in Dehradun. Any pre-teen would identify with the adventure, fun and warmth that comes with visiting grandparents on a leisurely vacation. The author's love for the house, its garden with innumerable flowers and weeds alike, his ability to befriend people around him and his amazement at and involvement in everything that went on in those premises, amidst the socio-political backdrop of the Quit India protests, all are deftly woven into the storyline.

Days during that trip were spent with the handful of people in and around the house. This included the gardener Dhuki, the tenant and neighbour Miss Kellner, and the grandmother herself. While the rest of the household took a siesta, Ruskin spent long afternoons observing and appreciating the garden with all its resident flowers and an occasional visitor. Around 3 pm every day, a Hoopoe frequented the lawn and soon became the object of his admiration. Other visitors to the house were the 'box-men' who carried different kinds of treasures in their boxes: needles and threads, china soap-dishes, bakery items like ginger biscuits and sometimes, lemon tart. He even got a closer view of his grandmother's life—how she handled her expenses and why she finally had to sell the house she lived in, one that was so loved.

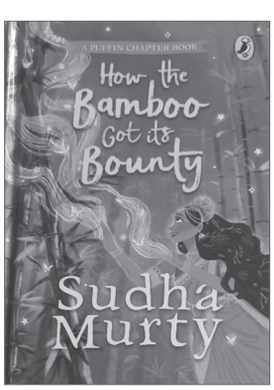
In the backdrop was the pre-Independence scenario, the time of the Quit India Movement. This for him meant that large crowds had to be avoided, given his fair skin. What was it like to be a child 'on the other side' of the movement, one wonders.

Ruskin Bond's writing, as usual, has clarity of expression and does not waste a single word. It flows steadily like a clear mountain stream, without splashing water on the sides. This quality has been consistent throughout his writings which helps make an instant connect with the reader. Though not many layers to the writing, there are some subtle yet profound statements like— 'It seemed obvious to me that a world without plants would be empty of everything else', or 'I had an inborn sense of justice', while talking about how unjust he thought it was to remove weeds like outcasts or perhaps plant them in the backyard, so that they could not be seen.

The illustrations are colourful, vibrant and with a life of their own. Priya Kuriyan has done a brilliant job with the bright red cover, bringing the *entire* garden to us. The purple mountains, lush green surroundings and the very elegant Hoopoe, all leave a lasting impression on the mind. She does a wonderful job at characterization which can be seen in the smile of the *tongawallah,* Bansi and the bent over Miss Kellner.

Ira Saxena

HOW THE BAMBOO GOT ITS BOUNTY
By Sudha Murty. Illustrated by Pari Satarkar. Cover Design by Samar Bansal
Puffin Books, 2024, pp. 42, ₹ 199.00



Text and pictures transport the reader to lush green forests in the beautiful book which relates to the story of the award-winning tree. Through a simple tale, narrated in the author's forceful and forthright prose, the tale conveys a strong lesson— 'that often the most ordinary things in life are the most valuable'.

The fantasy story brings home the fascination of forests, their beauty and some special trees– the Neem, Mango, Coconut and Bamboo tree. Everything in the forest is a living being; even the wind which communicates the forthcoming competition to the plants, shrubs and trees. The Queen of the forest enters the scene charismatically adding appeal and magnetism in the forest to announce an award.

An admirable use of characters, like the queen of the forest impresses to create adornment in the tale that wraps the meaningful communication to the readers. Some common trees stand out significantly, relating to their virtues as special features of the forests.

This chapter book is a charming ode to our bountiful forests and trees, their resilience and the abundant gifts they bestow upon us. Once the story begins, it is difficult to pause in between and let the story stall for a second. The movement of the story overwhelms the reader eager to reach the conclusion. The author emphasizes on the Bamboo tree, truly one of the most unsung and underrated trees found among others and in different varieties all over the world. It is useful to the common man in one way or another from birth to death.

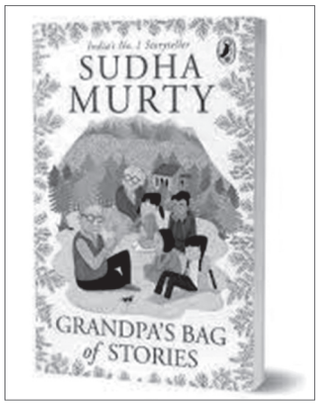
The text simply flows on the colourful pages assuming the enchanting green of the forests. It seems like moving from one space to another inside the forest, as we turn the pages. The illustrations bear the tones of colourful Nature which would grip the reader prompting him to go through each picture studiously.

As one of the Nature Series by the author, this one inspires the reader to search for the other two books titled, *How did the Earth get its Beauty* and *How the Sea Became Salty*.

Indira Ananthakrishnan

GRANDPA'S BAG OF STORIES
By Sudha Murty. Illustrated by Priya Kuriyan
Penguin Random House/Puffin Books, 2024, pp. 209,
₹ 250.00

To children it does not matter if Sudha Murty is a Padma Bhushan awardee or chairperson of the Infosys Foundation or even if she is the mother-in-law of the former Prime Minister of UK. They 'wow' in glee because she is a great storyteller, neither preachy nor didactic, but one who talks to their level as a friend. The secret is that she becomes a child and thinks like one when she is writing stories for them. Stories originate from a single source, her heart, and flow down to the readers as pure entertainment. She's aware that a child needs to have humour in stories and likes to see good things happening. Even if the protagonist is miserly, short tempered or unkind, happenings in the story make him a better person, and the reader breathes a sigh of relief to see the change in him. The change happens because of universal values he learns to adopt. Thus, these values which the reader should imbibe get seamlessly woven into the stories. They are not thrust on them. They surface via the characters and situations in the stories. I found that the stories do not have too much of description or long conversations, which are impediments to the racy build-up of the story. In one of her interviews, Sudha Murty confesses that she gives her script to some children to read before it goes to the publisher, and appreciates their free and frank criticism. Accordingly, she polishes the manuscripts and, hey presto! The stories almost immediately find their way to the printing press. Thereafter, the young readers can be seen chuckling and exclaiming as they get immersed in the printed book.



Why refer to only young readers? I, for one, enjoyed reading the stories. Grownups and seniors too, can vouch for the popularity of the book. In fact, the storytelling grandpa in the book tells grandma that the one book which enhanced his interest in reading and nurtured love for storytelling in him was Sudha Murty's *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories!*

As I settle down, book in hand, in my armchair, I realize that it is a delightful travelogue packed with adventure and stories. *Grandpa's Bag of Stories* takes me with grandpa, grandma and the four chirpy grandkids—Anushka, Krishna, Raghu and Meenu, to the scenic, hilly regions of Uttarakhand. As I move along with them like a silent witness, I am in for interesting, amusing and adventurous surprises. Nineteen chapters telling as many stories is a run of luck for sure. Grandpa does not have to dig into his bag for stories. They just pop up every now and then. The narration of the master storyteller leaves the reader in awe. At the same time, the travel continues. Travel and stories get interestingly intertwined.

The grandchildren are avid listeners. This is picturized vividly in Priya Kuriyan's coloured cover illustration. Even grandma's bespectacled eyes open wide in wonder at grandpa's talent that seems to outdo her own. In fact, she frankly remarks at the close— 'I didn't know you could tell such beautiful stories. I always thought I was the only storyteller in the family.' Grandpa replies, 'Nothing is impossible in life...'. As the reader closes the book, this valuable thought lingers in his mind.

I can't wait to delve into the stories. How many of us like bitter gourd? Very few! But we would like to know why the gourd happens to be bitter. Out pops a story from grandpa's bag to tell us why. This unusual story tells us through the interaction of Shankar the farmer and a mermaid what happens if we do not cultivate politeness, humility and respect for others.

A trip to Lohaghat, a hill station, is a treat of scenic beauty, tasty picnic food as well as a couple of surprise stories. One question from Krishna about the absence of peepul trees in the area triggers grandpa to tell the story of how the tree has been blessed by Shiva for its generosity and selflessness. Now Anushka observes the large number of trees in the hilly terrain that looked different from trees in the plains. They have green needle-like leaves that spread along the trunk from bottom to top. The story about these trees known as '*devadaru*' or deodar is told not by grandpa but by the person belonging to the hills, the *pahadi*, who brought them on this trip and invited them to a *pahadi* wedding. The story tells the reader how these stunningly tall trees remain green all year round.

A mouth-watering story about *jalebis* waits to jump out of grandpa's bag when the children gobble up jalebis at the *pahadi* marriage function. They enjoy not only the wedding ceremony and the *jalebis* but also the story about Chetan the *jalebi*-loving miser who learnt to be generous by sharing and caring.

I want to tell more about the other stories too. However, I should know I can't do everything I want to do. I will leave grandpa to do full justice to the stories and let the reader enjoy his telling along with the eye-catching black and white drawings by Priya Kuriyan.

One last word—editing with a keener eye would have ironed out the kinks in the text that appear now and then.

The book can be picked up from the book store or online and owned without hesitantly wondering, 'Should I, or shouldn't I?'

Richa Dang

EYE TO I WITH MY FIRST TIGER
By Nirmal Kulkarni. Illustrated by Aanchal Lodhi
Niyogi Books, 2024, pp. 36, ₹ 284.00

Invitingly titled, the story brings the reader 'eye to I' with wildlife. For the city-dwelling readers, the book is an experience which speaks about thrill and adventure along with long spells of boredom and waiting at times. Set in the wilderness of a jungle in the southern parts of the country, two teen wildlife enthusiasts, Nandu and Salu are setting camera traps and covering line transects. (If you don't know what this means, don't worry! The book will tell you.) They are hopeful of encountering some large animals in their natural habitat and if lucky, the king of the forest, the Royal Bengal Tiger itself.

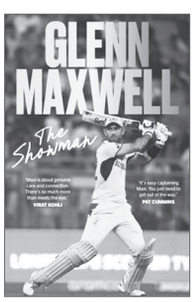
As the title suggests, this does happen but the reader has to undertake an interesting journey with Nandu and Salu filled with information, excitement, disappointment and envy. The writer introduces readers to the experiences of spending time in a forest. Descriptions of the weather, foliage, smells of the forest, variety of animal poops, sunlight through the trees, mosquitoes, and leeches create a sense of both pleasure and hardships one faces while experiencing the forests. References to wildlife terms, procedures, animal behaviour—'Hanuman Langurs, the sentries of the Indian jungle'—are woven through the course of Nandu and Salu's quest to see a tiger. However, at a few places, the story feels heavy with the technical information which takes away from the otherwise interesting story.

The story climaxes as both the friends come face to face with a tigress. Vivid description of their encounter is the highlight of the story. And at the end the writer offers a glimpse into the grown-up lives of narrator Nandu and his fellow enthusiast Salu.

The illustrations in the book merge with the text, seamlessly creating lively forest scenes. Text and illustrations complement each other well, and sometimes the text extends itself with the support of illustrations. Easy to hold size and paper quality add to the readability of the book.

The book also invites its young readers to imagine meeting their favourite bird/animal and to draw and write about it. Perhaps as an invitation to begin their quest to experience the actual wild, someday.

Book News ***Book News***

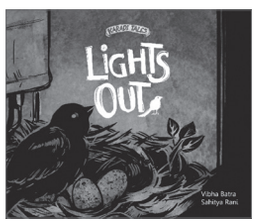


The Showman by Glenn Maxwell offers a captivating exploration of one of cricket's most enigmatic talents, a player whose name is synonymous with spectacle, resilience, and the boundless thrill of the game.

Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 288, ₹ 699.00

Vivek BG

LIGHTS OUT
By Vibha Batra. Illustrated by Sahitya Rani
Karadi Tales, 2024, pp. 36, ₹ 295.00



When my mother discovers caterpillars on her beloved Champa tree, she insists that I remove them, worried about the damage they might cause. Despite her concerns, I find myself either pushing it off to another day or pondering the fate of the tiny creatures if relocated. This internal conflict mirrors the central theme of *Lights Out*, a heart-warming picture book published by Karadi Tales and inspired by a true incident.

Vibha Batra crafts a story that resonates with anyone who has ever grappled with the dilemma of balancing human convenience with the needs of the natural world. In the small village of Pottakkudi, a seemingly simple event—a sparrow building a nest in a junction box—sets off a chain of emotions and actions among the villagers. The prospect of their streets being plunged into darkness after sundown stirs a mix of reactions—from frustration to empathy.

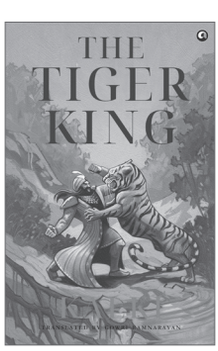
The protagonist, Karthik, along with his family and friends, becomes the heart of the village's collective effort to navigate this unusual situation, often reminding the villagers of the best in them. Through strong, relatable characters, Vibha captures the essence of community life, where everyone's opinion is listened to and every decision is weighed with care. The villagers' initial irritation gradually gives way to a shared sense of purpose, as they rally around the sparrow and her brood, overlooking the inconvenience of darkness.

Sahitya Rani's monochromatic illustrations beautifully complement the narrative, bringing Pottakkudi's nocturnal world to life. The artwork subtly conveys the range of emotions felt by the villagers—angst, hope, sympathy, and love—all of which are tied to the fate of the sparrow family. The story reaches its peak with a moment of collective joy for the villagers, who have become deeply invested in the tiny lives they chose to protect.

Lights Out is not just a simple story; it's a testament to the power of community and the impact of small, compassionate actions. Recognized for its poignant narrative and beautiful illustrations, this picture book earned a well-deserved spot on the Parag Honour List 2024. It serves as a gentle reminder that sometimes, the smallest creatures can bring out the best in us, urging us to maintain the delicate balance between human progress and nature's needs.

Shivani Bajaj

THE TIGER KING
By Kalki (R. Krishnamurthy). Translated from the original Tamil by Gowri Ramnarayan. Illustrated by Krishna Bala Shenoi
Aleph Book Company, 2024, pp. 35, ₹ 199.00



The story is a remarkable mix of fantasy and folk. Translated from the original Tamil by Gowri Ramanarayan, the original author is R. Krishnamurthy, better known by his pen name, Kalki. Kalki was a journalist, poet and critic. His stories are known for their subtle satire.

The Tiger King revolves around the Maharaja of Pratibandapuram, who otherwise has many titles to his credit, but is popularly known as 'The Tiger King'. He is born under extraordinary stars and his death is also prophesied by an astrologer as being unusual. In order to prove his prowess and turn the tables on fate, the Tiger King shifts his entire focus on this mission, eventually ending up ignoring his kingdom, his people and his family.

Since he is destined to die by a tiger's attack, the Maharaja in question kills 99 tigers not only in his own kingdom, but also in his in-laws' kingdom, as the reader unbelievingly reads on. In fact, his only condition for marriage is that his wife should belong to a kingdom where the tiger population is more, so that he could kill them. What happens when he goes to kill the 100th tiger and what his fate is eventually is a beautifully and enticingly crafted climax by Kalki. Kalki's storytelling keeps you engrossed, while wondering at the stupidity of the king and his advisors.

The satire lies in the reaction of the king—the insecurity of a 'brave' ruler drives him to brutally kill so many innocent wild animals out of sheer arrogance and a false sense of pride and power. The story also gives a sense of the political scene and dynamics—favours and suppression meted out by the British to individual *Rajas* in the Princely States in the pre-Independence era. It speaks of the control the British had over the kings and

how the latter constantly appeased them with gifts. All this, to keep their small kingdoms and retain 'power', which actually was absent.

Some details in the story could have been avoided as they did not lead anywhere till the very end, thus possibly making it more gripping, to-the-point and an easier and smoother read.

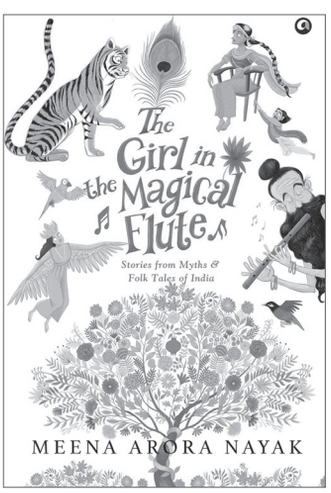
Illustrations by Krishna Bala Shenoi border on the comic style, accentuating and ridiculing at the same time, the foolish, almost comical behaviour of the King. The tigers look animated rather than real, making the reader wonder at and question the strength and bravery of the Tiger King himself. Though the focus of the story is the Tiger King's irrational behaviour, do we also see some merit in the astrologer's prophecy and 'fate', and does the book promote it too? Best for the readers to figure that out for themselves. A one-time read for sure, that every 8- to 12-year-old would enjoy!

Ilika Trivedi

THE GIRL IN THE MAGICAL FLUTE: STORIES FROM MYTHS & FOLK TALES OF INDIA

By Meena Arora Nayak. Illustrated by Priya Kuriyan

Aleph Book Company, 2023, pp. 183, ₹ 599.00



Folk tales are passed down from one generation to the next and they are the mainstay of all cultures, countries and families. *The Girl in the Magical Flute* is a beautiful book filled with many such tales, all of which can become the highlight of family time—with magical bedtime stories intriguing children and capturing their interest along with lessons to take away for the future. The book is also filled with beautiful illustrations and sketches by Priya Kuriyan which accompany each story, stimulating the imagination of young readers and listeners.

Meena Arora Nayak is a excellent storyteller and this book is an attempt at bringing classic folk tales and lore from India and beyond into a single compendium. Sourced from classical religious texts such as the Ramayana, the Quran, the Bible, and from oral traditions across India, including those of the Ho, Munda, and Khasi tribes, the nineteen stories in this collection will appeal to children of all ages and interests. Our cultures and families can often limit us to familiar tales of our own background but this book is a beautiful introduction to the different types of folk tales which are famous across cultures. There is a story from the Old Testament about Moses and his staff, another from the *Harivamsha Purana* about the magical Parijaat Tree and another about a tree that knows the fate of all the people from the Holy Quran! Reading such tales is a beautiful introduction to different cultures for all children, no matter their background.

Young children would love these tales as bedtime stories, especially because of the magical realism factor. What's common among a flute, a *charpai*, a sarangi, a staff, a tree, a fan, and a bed? Well, these are all magical objects in the stories of this book! In fact, these are just a few of the magical objects that make this book beyond interesting! These stories give ample opportunities for active narration with multiple characters, animated voice modulations and dramatic changes in the storyline, which can build an amazing reading and listening experience at the same time. These short stories would capture the curiosity of young minds, and parents should be prepared to answer the litany of questions that are sure to follow afterwards.

A unique aspect of this book are the stories from different tribal groups across India. It is a shame that despite being a nation with numerous tribes spread across the length and breadth of this country, majority of the population is mostly unaware of their traditions, culture and history. This is possibly due to their geographical remoteness but in this age of connectivity, we must actively try to learn more about the tribal groups of India and this book is successful in ensuring the same. The girl trapped in the magical flute of the tale from Ho and Munda tribes and the creation myth of the Minyong tribe of Arunachal Pradesh are some examples of the same. There is even a legend from the Andaman Islands! The Khasi folk tale, 'The Magical Tree between Heaven and Earth' deserves a standout mention for being a short, beautiful and extraordinarily memorable story!

The narration of these tales is done in a simple but wonderful manner, with beautiful descriptions interspersed with engaging dialogue. Young children can read the book easily while simultaneously developing their vocabulary and improving their language. Some of the stories are retellings of tales collected by Maeve Stokes in the year 1880, which shows the dedication of the author to bring authentic folk tales that have stood the test of time, to the present generation of children.

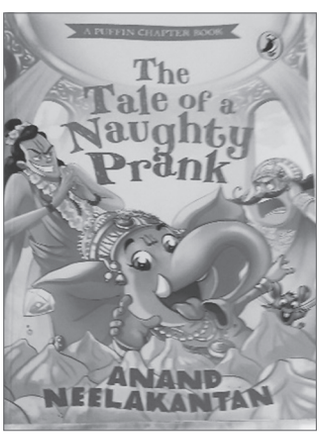
Living creatures like birds, animals and trees are beautifully incorporated in the tales of this book and the world is shown to be belonging to them equally. These stories are a great foundation for children in order to realize

the importance of each species, especially in a deteriorating world damaged by climate change. The children of today would be the adults who will have to face the environmental crisis eventually, and these tales can instil a sense of respect for nature from childhood itself.

These tales also give important lessons of kindness, listening to one's parents, care, friendship, humility, and teamwork. Anyone looking to instil these values in their children will surely be happy with the lessons underlying most of these tales. This unique book is a great addition to any budding reader's library. The imagination and curiosity of children is bound to be ignited and satisfied, with newer ideas and lessons to be learned from every story in this collection.

Ira Saxena

THE TALE OF A NAUGHTY PRANK
By Anand Neelakantan. Illustrated by Doodlenerve. Cover Design by Gina James
Puffin Books, 2024, pp. 42, ₹ 199.00



The tale of a naughty prank is a popular mythological story, an uncommon one among children's books.

The author has selected a special story from mythology and presented it in a manner to enthral the modern school-going children. The story relates the incident of miserly and rich Kubera, perpetually greedy for more riches, falling into the trap of Narada Muni to gain a boon of abundant wealth from Shiva. Narada makes him agree to treat Ganesha with *modaks* on his birthday. It is a mischievous prank of Narada, so appropriately enchanting for young readers. The tale contains all the ingredients that attract small children – the glamour of riches, piles of gold, mountains of precious rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds; mischief, birthdays and devouring sweets. The characters, too, have been portrayed accordingly to amuse the young readers.

Narada considered it his duty to play these pranks, for most of his pranks ended up teaching a lesson and truth told. Here he plays the trick on the world's richest man, Kubera, charmingly described as a funny-looking dwarf in silk *dhoti* and golden crown singing of his wealth— 'Nothing is sweeter than money; not even a jugful of honey.'

And Narada is described as a person— '…not even the blood thirsty *rakta-rakshasas*, flesh eating *pisachas* or grave-haunting *vetalas* inspired as much terror as this sage did. Wherever Narada went, trouble followed him like a pet dog.'

The story moves on with Narada convincing Kubera to throw a *modak* treat for Ganesha who jumps up and down yelling, 'I want *MODAK*. I want *MODAK*,' tagging along with Narada.

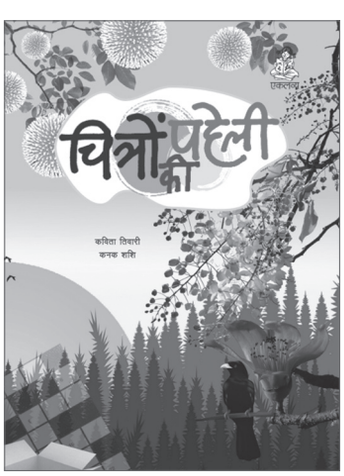
There is a touch of humour and fun flowing through the text at every turn. The long story has been split into chapters. Interestingly, for better grasp of the language difficult words and phrases have been highlighted sustaining the flow of the text and enabling enhanced understanding by the emerging readers.

This is a colourful book where characters come alive from fantasy situations into action. Ganesha looks like a little seven-year-old full of beans enraptured in his action. Every page brings out a palette of eye-catching pictures involving the reader in the drama of the scene. Indeed, a real treat for young readers of ages 8-10 years.

Upasana Chaubey

CHITRON KI PAHELI
Compilation and Design by Kavita Tiwary and Kanak Shashi. Illustrated by Kailash Dubey and Vivek Verma
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 32, ₹ 50.00

'*Man is a Puzzle-Solving Animal.*' -Ronaldo A. Knox



Solving puzzles is a natural instinct of humans. The thrill of it is the real joy. Joy makes learning easy. There are various ways to make learning enjoyable, but when it comes to learning words and numbers with excitement, creating your own path and reaching the right solution is an interesting journey. This journey offers many stages and opportunities to engage children in mental exercise.

Since infancy, children are constantly exposed to different types of words. Parents, neighbors, relatives, and

people around them come from diverse environments, lifestyles, and sometimes even different cultural backgrounds. As a result, many types of words are added to the children's vocabulary. Words carry their culture and environment along with their meaning. Children listen to words and, at the same time, read the facial expressions of adults. In this process, they learn to connect words with context.

While working with young children, I discovered something interesting. I had pasted many posters of poems in the room. I read one of these posters to the children. They listened to the poem, enjoyed it, and learned the words, but did not adopt them. One girl was learning to mix vowels at that time. She read the second poster herself, mixing vowels to form words. Although the child's understanding of the full meaning was limited, she grasped at least the periphery of it. The happiness and confidence on her face at that moment were like the thrill of discovering something new. This is what puzzles actually do.

Visual perception is crucial for learning to read and write. Riddles develop many aspects of visual perception, such as:

Visual memory–the ability to remember what is seen

Visual discrimination–recognizing similarities and differences in objects

Visual perception–understanding the meaning of what is seen

Shape perception–recognizing common shapes

Visual analysis and synthesis

The book *Chitron Ki Paheli* is an important achievement of the *Chakmak* magazine published by Eklavya. Through this book, Eklavya has once again proved that they are experts in bringing education and entertainment together. The magazine *Chakmak* has brought together entertaining elements like picture puzzles and mathematical sudoku to provide a unique experience to the readers.

The picture puzzles published in *Chakmak* magazine over the years have been collected in this book. Compiled in an attractive format, this book entertains the readers and takes them to a different world. The picture puzzles and sudoku enhance understanding and help develop problem solving skills. For readers interested in mathematics, mathematical sudoku created by Sajitha Nair is an attractive option. Finding words and numbers in the right context and using them appropriately is the second stage of this adventure.

The book also contains pictures of objects, signs, and references. Through these pictures, children reach the words and then connect back to the original letters via the pictures. This process strengthens their ability to associate letters with pictures. Not only do they learn letters, but they also acquire the skill of connecting things with context.

Erno Rubik has said something very insightful about puzzles: 'For me, the most enjoyable part of the puzzle is the process of solving it, not the solution itself.' Solving a puzzle is a confidence booster, especially when a child has accomplished it on its own. The puzzles in this picture puzzle book are designed to challenge children's understanding without being overly complex or too simple. Children quickly lose interest in overly simple puzzles, and if they cannot solve more complex puzzles despite their efforts, their confidence may wane and they might become disinterested.

The structure of the picture puzzle book includes both word and number puzzles. It features commonly used words as well as those that are now almost obsolete, serving as an attempt to preserve such words. Children also get acquainted with their culture and social structure through these extinct words. For instance, the word '*Guldan*' which is originally Persian is now rarely used. Additionally, the book includes statistics, sudoku, and logic-based puzzles where numbers must be placed in boxes in the correct order. This is an excellent activity to encourage children to channel their complete attention without getting distracted, and can gradually train them to concentrate for extended periods.

Overall, *Chitron ki Paheli* provides ample nourishment, adventure, and fun for the cognitive development and logical growth of children.

Anil Singh

TOTIYA TEETAR
By Prabhat. Illustrated by Proiti Roy
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 36, ₹ 70.00

Prabhat's newest collection of poems–*Totiya Teetar*–is very different from all his previous poetry collections. This is a unique collection of very small poems, each poem of only four lines.

The first poem itself, titled '*Panchhi',* gives us a peek into the detailed and wide nature of Prabhat's observational lens.

'पंछी बरगद के पत्तों पर
पैदल पैदल चल लेते हैं।'

In another poem, the hen is scolding the cock to sneeze with some manners! This kind of interaction has neither been seen ever nor heard. But Prabhat's eyes are able to perceive the exchange between the hen and the cock!

The illustrations by Proiti Roy in this collection are unparalleled. The supple gait of the cock, the hen's coming close to the cock to give instructions, the anger and complaint in her eyes, worrying that the little kid will wake up, the cock's bending forward and shutting of eyes to sneeze–are all clearly etched.

Here is another example of the simple magic that only Prabhat can create:

'चींटा चींटी
पाकर चीनी
खेल रहे थे
छीना छीनी'

The magic of a full scene, full fun and full language usage in such tiny phrases. The choice of words, like using छीना–छीनी and not छीना–झपटी also shows how Prabhat has saved this poem from a possible fight, and instead weaved it with play, friendly quarrels and love.

In the poem '*Rikshewala*', he says:

'स्टेशन से घर गलियों तक,
सफर सभी का हो गया,
देर रात को रिक्शेवाला,
रिक्शे पर ही सो गया।'

Proiti's illustration of the *Rikshewala* sleeping on the rikshaw is so alive–it shows the mixed feelings of tiredness, innocence, helplessness and satisfaction on the sleeping face–all rolled into one. It is amazing how she is able to etch this with the help of such few strokes.

See another poem – '*Rael Aur Whale*':

'रेल चली भई रेल चली,
नभ में कुरजों की बेल चली
समंदरों में व्हेल चली,
व्हेल चली भई व्हेल चली।'

This combination of *Rael*, *Bel* and *Whale* is unique to Prabhat. To capture the movement of a train (*rael*), the cosmic strings of stars ('*nabh mein kurjon ki bel*') and the swim of a whale in the sea–all in a single frame–is like a painter's imagination at work. That is the power and depth of Prabhat's observations.

In the title poem–'*Totiya Teetar*'–Prabhat writes like a discoverer and someone who looks at everything with a natural inquisitiveness and curiosity:

'घास को चलते कभी न देखा
वह टिड्डा था घास सरीखा
चलता था जो घास के भीतर
जैसे कोई तोतिया तीतर।'

The poetry collection is like a collage of everyday things around us that are still so important and beautiful.

REGISTAN MEIN BUS

By Prabhat. Illustrated by Rishi Sahany

Jugnoo Prakashan, an Imprint of Ektara Trust, 2023, pp. 52, ₹ 150.00

Registan Mein Bus is a colourful bouquet of 28 short poems. This bouquet encloses the sand dunes and *dhanis* of Rajasthan, the herds of sheep and the golden-yellow flowers of *Babool*. One does not feel scalded by the scorching heat nor feel the discomfort of walking on the burning sand, nor is upset by the dusty storms. Instead, unique pictures of Rajasthan and its natural surroundings are expressed in Prabhat's poems, in all their joy and beauty. Someone who has eyes for ants, rats, dry leaves, pools and puddles, electricity poles, cats and goat kids, sees and creates a very different world indeed.

A hungry and weak tigress cannot *just happen* to be the topic for his poem. He worries about her condition, need and helplessness with the same passion with which he narrates the sorrow of having to settle in a city while searching for the taste of village *gud*, made by slow boiling in a *bhatti*.

Registan Mein Bus is very different in a number of ways. There are so many colours and contours to it, and each one is so different from the other. On the one hand, he surprises you with the long list of things that have knowingly or unknowingly been left behind, along with the smallest of things that are easily available in the village market or *haat.* While in another poem, he does not mince his words while writing about the horror of a curfew or an Emergency that threatens democracy.

The coming of the fire brigade is '*Damkal, damkal, damkal*', and when water is splashed to put out the fire, he writes, '*chhal chhal, chhal chhal, chhal chhal*', creating a stir in the entire scenario. Seeing a burning building and smoke coming out of it, he writes— '*Bole babu Chitranjan, building hai ya bhaap ka engine*', and increases the fun element in it. Then one recalls that Chitranjan and the steam engine have yet another connection between them.

The water colour illustrations by Rishi Sahany in this book enhance Prabhat's world of poems, making them more vibrant and vocal. One can feel the presence of Rajasthan full force, in the illustration of the poem titled, '*Registan Mein* Bus'. The bus driver with a thick moustache wearing a heavy gray turban, flocks of gazelles on the road, herds of camels, sheep and pheasants, fearless passengers sitting on the roof—all together represent Rajasthan.

This collection of poems should be available in every library, school and home.

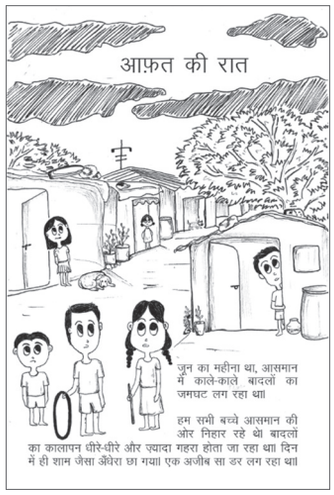
Maya Maurya

ALGAAV
By Vandana Jhajhoria. Illustrated by Swarangi Sawant
Muskaan, 2024, pp. 8, ₹ 15.00

This story is about the friendship that develops between two children of different faiths. Both become friends when they bond over food, but food ultimately breaks apart their friendship. They begin by liking each other's company; they admire each other's clothes, earrings, anklets, etc. Slowly, as the story progresses, their friendship also grows and deepens. But one day, while asking her mother to place an extra two rotis in her tiffin for her friend, the author is told by her parents that she must not be friends with Saleema anymore; she is warned that her friend might feed her something deceitfully. As this seed of doubt is planted in the child's mind, she too starts distancing herself from her friend. Gradually, Saleema, too, stops coming to school. The protagonist wonders if she should go to Saleema's home and find out what has happened, but scared of what her parents might say if they found out, she doesn't go. This experience and concern for Saleema still troubles the child author, and these questions remain in her mind many years later as she writes this story. Their friendship could not survive the pressure of the stereotypes associated with a particular religion and the barriers that society and, in this case, the family placed on the child. So, the author wonders where her friend would be now, how religion barged into the relationship they shared, why her parents said what they did to make her doubt her friend, and whether religion should be a factor when we become friends with someone. The author laments the loss of a friend in this story.

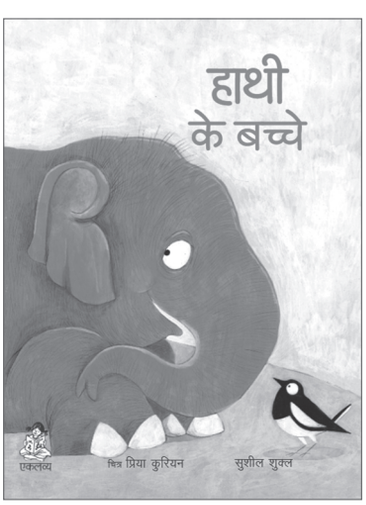
AAFAT KI RAAT
By Gudiya Dhurve. Illustrated by Divya Thakur
Muskaan, 2024, pp. 8, ₹ 12.00

We encounter the many difficulties the rains bring with them in this story. Everyone is sitting tired, hungry, thirsty, and unable to sleep because the water is dripping through the *panni* (plastic sheet) that is the roof. Vessels placed at various spots to catch this water keep filling up; they are emptied and placed again, and this continues through the night. Everyone in the *basti* is doing the same, and everyone is tired and stressed. At one point, the story alludes to those who live in buildings built with brick and concrete and how they don't have to face these difficulties like we do; they are able to sleep through the night peacefully. But all those living in *kaccha* houses, like us, struggle, and their situation is like ours. In our lives, the joy that rain brings is dependent on the kind of houses we live in and our circumstances. So, while for some, '*bha*' is for '*bheegna*' and to enjoy splashing around in the rain, for others, '*bha*' is also for '*bhookh*', the hunger we suffer from.



Kamlesh Chandra Joshi

HAATHI KE BACHCHE
By Sushil Shukla. Illustrated by Priya Kurien
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 12, ₹ 130.00



In the recent years, we have seen many new experiments in poems for children. Old and new poets are a part of this trend. On reading these poems one realizes that the gaze for seeing one's environment has changed, as has the manner of expression. One can see experimental new usage of language and construction.

Having established his presence as the editor of renowned children's magazines—*Chakmak, Pluto* and *Cycle*, Sushil Shukla is known for relentless experimentation in his creations—his poetic signature.

Eklavya has published several of his poetry books in the last few years which have found good readership. In continuation, this year too sees Sushil Shukla's latest

poem for children—*Haathi ke Bachche*. Sushil's love for nature, the environment, trees and animals and other living creatures comes through in his writing. This poem is about baby elephants.

In many poems written about animals and birds, one gets the feeling that it is a description about the creature and not so much a feel for 'who' the animal or tree is and to be surprised by them, as in Shriprasad's poem, *'Haathi Challam Challam'* or Prayag Shukla's *'Dhammak Dhammak'*. We experience the same thing in this illustrated poem, where the animal friends in the jungle curiously look at the limbs and examine the body parts of the baby elephant, which has become a game. The reader too experiences this game/playfulness.

It is important to examine the perspective here. You get some clues from the poem. At the start as you read the poem, you may think it points out the uniqueness of different parts of the baby elephant's body. But as we progress reading, we realize it is not so.

There are two things in the poem. First is the child's simple thought–why have my teeth not emerged? Elephant's teeth (tusks) are visible to everyone and the baby elephant is understandably worried that his/her jungle friends will ask. S/he is sad because of the absent teeth, as we gather from the next few lines. The calf's curiosity as to why have they not emerged is similar to the concern and curiosity the great poet Surdas expresses in his poem on Krishna being worried about his hair/braid not growing.

The second thought in the poem is how do the jungle friends react/behave towards the calf? Presumably their behaviour/treatment remains unchanged. If the treatment changes, it is troublesome—as seen in the popular children's story, '*Saat Poonch*' (Seven Tails), where everyone teases viciously and Saat Poonch is not accepted in the community for having seven tails. But it is not so in this poem. The animal friends look at the calf's feet, legs, tail and praise the parts–

चार–चार होते हैं / फिर भी पैर चले आए
इतना वज़न उठाए / मनाते खैर चले आए

Here the poet has a fresh new way of using 'खैर मनाना'.

The poet's innovative way of manipulating language for a very visual effect is seen in the following lines as well—

टाँग से लम्बी टंगीदृटंगी / ये सूँड़ चली आई
मत उदास हो, जाने दो / कोई बात नहीं

These lines appear to console the sad calf.

The poem's excitement and joy are conveyed through the lines—

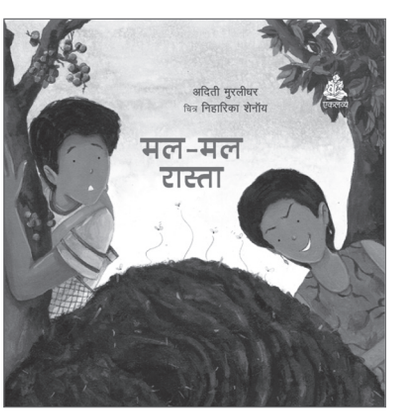
ओ हाथी के बच्चे / तुम पे प्यार बहुत आए
आए तुमसे दुनिया में / बहार बहुत आए

…reminding one of Nazir Akbarabadi's poem, '*Reech ka Bachcha*' (The Bear Cub).

Priya Kurien's illustrations capture well the openness and curiosity with which the monkeys and tiger, crocodile and birds see the calf. There are big and small animals, but no discrimination on hierarchy of size is seen–there is a sense of community in the pictures which is now difficult to observe. The illustrations complement the text and help the meaning to emerge better. Young children can be encouraged to think and discuss these ideas and pictures. This illustrated poem is also available in board book format for very young children.

Shivani Bajaj

MAL-MAL RASTA
By Adithi Muralidhar. Illustrated by Niharika Shenoy
Translated from the English by Poonam Jain
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 26, ₹ 100.00



How do we visit a jungle and find out about the animals living there without actually sighting even a single one?! If this question intrigues you, this book is for you.

Usually, children's books that speak about the flora and fauna of a particular area are laden with information, names and facts. *Mal-Mal Rasta* is an unusual book with an interesting approach to an unusual theme. It has been translated from *The Poopy Path* in English, prepared by Homi Bhabha Science Centre for Education. The author, Adithi, is a scientist cum educator at the Centre.

The book tries to help observe and explore things that are generally overlooked in the jungle or any other place for that matter–faeces or animal poop. The title '*Mal-Mal Rasta*' literally means a path with a lot of poop. Once you are done wrinkling your nose, let's move on. Searching for pug-marks is one of the common practices to locate wild animals in a forest or to identify its inhabitants. Another way could be to observe the various kinds of animal dung or droppings in any jungle.

The book, with the help of two kids, takes us on a trip through the forest where the size, shape and amount of faeces help identify the animal it belongs to. As the children go through this exciting journey of discovering who the inhabitants of the forest are, we as readers also get

intrigued by the information waste (literally) can give us.

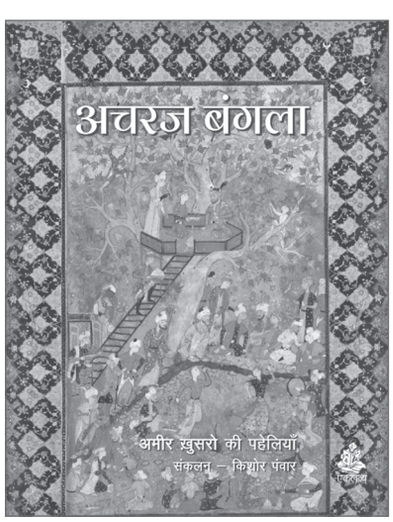
Even though the book is a translation from English, the language flows well and on first reading it appears to be an original piece in Hindi. The conversations sound very natural, and the language is simple and crisp.

The illustrations are an earthy mix of shades of green and brown, depicting the hills, flora of the Western Ghats and of course, the theme of the book—the dung. The photographs at the beginning and end of the book give it a realistic touch, validating that Chorla Ghat is a real place and the information in the book is true. In fact, illustrations of the landscape are a close copy of the photographs.

The paper size gives ample space to cover the length and breadth of the landscape and the density of the forest area. A double page illustration of a wild buffalo's dung exaggerates the enormity of it. Even the single page illustrations have a good square shaped expanse, covering the expanse of the sky and the land area all in one frame.

Navnit Nirav

ACHRAJ BANGLA: AMIR KHUSRO KI PAHELIYAN
By Amir Khusro. Collection by Kishore Panwar. Illustrated by Shivangi Singh
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 64, ₹ 50.00



Amir Khusro's *Achraj Bangla* is a collection of riddles centered on nature, a timeless treasure that continues to captivate readers of all ages. These centuries-old puzzles, crafted with simplicity and elegance, not only entertain but also encourage us to observe the world around us more closely.

In my work with teachers across various regions, I have found these riddles to be invaluable tools for fostering language skills and critical thinking. For instance, the riddle, '*Peeli-peeli nadiya mein gol-gol ande/ Nahin bataoge to padenge dande*' (In a yellow river, round eggs. If you don't tell, you'll be punished), often leads to a flurry of guesses—from mustard seeds to the *rasgulla*. The process of arriving at the correct answer—*kadhi pakora* (a deep-fried snack)—is filled with laughter and learning.

Beyond their entertainment value, these riddles offer a glimpse into the past, revealing a world where people were deeply connected to nature and their communities. By sharing these riddles with children, we can foster a similar sense of wonder and curiosity.

Achraj Bangla is more than just a collection of riddles; it is cultural heritage. These puzzles reflect local culture, traditions and lifestyles, introducing us to the wisdom and imagination of our ancestors. Each riddle is a small window into the past, offering insights into the way people thought, lived, and perceived the world.

The riddles in the book provide a valuable resource for understanding the history and traditions of the region where they originated.

Moreover, these riddles can serve as a powerful tool for language learning. The simple yet evocative language used in the riddles can help learners to expand their vocabulary, improve their understanding of grammar, and develop their ability to think critically.

In addition to their educational value, these riddles can also be a fun and engaging way to spend time with family and friends. They can be used to spark conversations, encourage creativity, and foster a sense of community.

Achraj Bangla is a valuable resource for educators, parents, and anyone who appreciates the beauty of language and the joy of discovery.

Jacinta Kerketta

MAVLI
By Geeta Dhurve. Illustrated by Heera Dhurve
Muskaan, 2023, pp. 16, ₹ 80.00

Often, when children pose questions that adults don't have answers to, they avoid the questions by saying things like, 'God only will have the answer to this', and when asked, 'Who is God? Who should we go to, to ask this?', children are often pointed to an idol or an image of God. Then, the children bow their heads in front of this image daily and learn to talk to God. In this way, God or *Bhagwaan* enters the lives of children, and the

presence of God becomes more believable than even those of fellow humans. Mavli is not visible; she has no photo or idol. She lives in the *chulha* or can be in the *adaka*. Mavli can be anywhere. And since she can be anywhere, everything that belongs to the Earth, whether it is living or not, should be respected. This is what Aaji (Gehna's grandmother) tells young Gehna. Actually, Mavli lives within our homes and our consciousness. She can't be felt just because someone tells us she is there. She can only be found when we try to find her within us, alone.

Mavli is a small story, but it is profound and vast. It's a story that tells us that in Adivasi communities, people's understanding of belief and faith goes beyond the term 'religion' or '*dharm*'. Its expanse is extensive. Even though Mavli is talked about, revered and respected across generations, her presence can only be felt in a personal and intimate search. As soon as one feels Mavli's presence, one feels responsible towards and concerned for every little object and being.

We see the ways organized religion has been failing to establish love, concern and respect in our society. In such a time, a story like *Mavli* takes us closer to understanding the worldview and the strength hidden in the beliefs of the Adivasis, where the gods and deities don't need grand monuments and tall structures to be remembered. For the Adivasis, the deities that give them life, that live with them, watch over them and help them in their struggles are in the strength that has lived on within our ancestors before us, and continues to live on in us, helping restore balance on the Earth. They can exist in the smallest thing like the *chulha* or the pot upon it, and that's why respecting and caring for each and every one is crucial. The story emphasizes this. The heat keeps the *chulha* burning, and it is this heat of the fire that also sustains our lives; it spreads light into our consciousness. That's why, as soon as young Gehna experiences the powerful heat of the fire within herself, a change occurs in her demeanour. A carefree Gehna suddenly starts picking up and gathering the ashes of the *chulha* with great care and attention. She has experienced Mavli, and Aaji also knows that just as Mavli has been with their ancestors before them for generations, she will walk with and watch over Gehna, too. And so, Aaji, too, with great affection and happiness, starts getting ready to prepare a fish for their meal. Here, a small story starts becoming bigger.

The author Geeta Dhurve, and illustrator Heera Dhurve have written and illustrated beautifully. I extend my gratitude and Johar to them for making such a story. I also thank the publisher, Muskaan, since these stories ordinarily don't find space in discussions with children or even adults, and they are bringing them out for readers with sensitivity and courage.

Aisha Kawalkar

BIO-INSPIRED! THE LIVING WORLD SHOWS THE WAY
By Muriel Zürcher. Illustrated by Sua Balac. Translated from the original French by Ranjitha Seshadri
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 64, ₹ 260.00

JAIV-PRERIT! JEEV-JAGAT DETA HAI NAYE-NAYE VICHAAR
By Muriel Zürcher. Illustrated by Sua Balac. Translated from the original French by Madhuri Tiwari
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 64, ₹ 200.00

A good friend, when he saw this book fresh on the shelves, immediately thought of me and how relevant it would be for our joint work in critical science and environment education. As someone who has always been fascinated by the living world, whose bucket list has been full of to-dos like scuba diving to see the glorious underwater world, and flying over landscapes to get a bird's eye view, this book indeed resonated deeply with me. *Bio-inspired!* is more than just a book—it's an invitation to view the world through the lens of nature's genius. It celebrates the wonder and wisdom inherent in the diverse living world that surrounds us, and dives into how nature has inspired some of the most innovative and sustainable technological advancements in human history.

As I turned the pages, taking in the sheer beauty embodied in the words and pictures, I was sure my teenage daughter would also love it. And sure, she had a shine in her eyes and a wide smile on her face as we read this together and had an animated discussion. She loved the parallels drawn across seemingly different situations (like the hibernating bear and astronauts in the space station), and the ingenious designs in the natural world like the ventilation system of the termite hill. She also insisted that we share the book with her friend who was coming over. Thus, *Bio-inspired!* is one of those marvellous finds that you can't keep to yourself, that you are excited to share with others.

This book is an engaging and visually captivating exploration of the fascinating world of biomimicry.

Muriel Zürcher brilliantly demystifies the concept, with a writing style that is informative yet conversational, making the science behind biomimicry both accessible and intriguing. She poignantly makes the point that life on earth with a history spanning 3.5 billion years, has survived catastrophes like the ice ages and meteor falls, but it is only in the last few centuries that its balance is being lost due to human indifference. We cannot continue to consume at the same pace as earlier and solutions are being sought to find a new balance between human beings, the Earth and the other species living on it. This is where biomimicry steps in, which involves observing other living beings in nature thriving together and finding inspiration to invent and improve objects, materials or techniques. Initially, I was slightly wary… what if this hints at more extraction from nature? However, Zürcher emphasizes that it is essentially also about imagining new, more sustainable ways of consuming, producing and living.

The book covers a broad range of examples where nature's ingenuity has influenced innovation, from the aerodynamic design of aeroplanes mimicking the gliding of birds to reduce fuel consumption, to the production of non-toxic plywood inspired by the glue produced by mussels on rocky sea shores. For a few examples, I felt the content was too brief and had to look up to know more, but I guess, then the book does its job well–to spark curiosity to explore further.

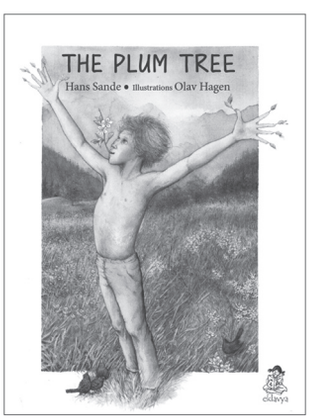
Sua Balac's illustrations are a standout feature of this book. His artwork beautifully complements the text, illustrating the complex principles of biomimicry through mesmerizing pictures that are indeed worth a thousand words. The spectacular depictions of plants, animals, and their technological counterparts enhance the reader's understanding of the scientific principles being discussed but also evoke a sense of awe. The style of illustration seemed peculiar and I learnt that Balac has this characteristic style, inspired by the classic ligne claire (French for 'clear line') style with the use of vibrant colours and simple forms that bring the concepts to life. This makes the book as much a visual treat as an intellectual one. The paper and print quality by Eklavya do justice to the artwork.

A delightful blend of education and artistry, *Bio-inspired!* is suitable for a wide audience, including young readers with an interest in science and technology and adults looking for an insightful teaching-learning resource. Moreover, it's for anyone who has ever paused to marvel at a sunset or to feel the calming effect of a walk in the woods. Muriel Zürcher and Sua Balac have crafted a work that not only informs about an emerging field but also inspires us to reconnect with nature. In a world that is so dangerously anthropocentric, this book serves as a beautiful reminder that the more our world functions like (and coexists with) the natural world, the more likely we are to endure in this home that is ours, but not ours alone.

Reading the book took me back to those therapeutic early mornings spent in my small balcony garden, making observations like how the delicate spiral of a fern unfurling inspires the elegant structures in architecture and design. Thus, *Bio-inspired!* feels like a gentle reminder to slow down and observe. It highlights how everyday encounters with nature—like the way raindrops bead on a leaf or how a spider spins its web—are more than just beautiful; they are lessons in efficiency, resilience, and sustainability.

Nidhi Gulati and Shivi

THE PLUM TREE
By Hans Sande. Illustrated by Olav Hagen
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 32, ₹ 100.00



In another of his metaphorical descriptions of trauma, Hans Sande takes up the topic of puberty and growth. The Norwegian storyteller symbolizes the age of adolescence and the infinite changes that one goes through. As the story begins, a child falls sick after swallowing plums. He gradually believes that a tree is growing from within him, sprouting through his fingertips and his mouth. He stops eating and instead gulps water. He steps out into the garden and feels that his skin is turning into bark. His feet sprout roots. The boy becomes a miracle of a human changing into a tree, with leaves, buds, flowers, branches and roots. Soon, he stops talking and stands still in the garden. At first, he is a sight of amazement and wonder for many, but eventually, seeks solace in his own company. After spending years away from his father, he returns, like a prodigal son.

The father of the boy is confused; his feelings shift from despair and horror to acceptance until he proudly shows off his son, now a strange creature in the garden. One day, the boy walks away to a cold place, far from human life. He stands in the cold, motionless and barely responding. Over time, a family comes to live near the tree and develops a close bond with it. They love the tree, and it loves them in return. The tree begins to listen to the people talking under its branches and gradually starts talking to the children's family. His ability to talk

is revealed to the adults. They ask him, 'Do you wish to become a human being again?' The family slowly helps him return to human form, ripping his roots, scraping his bark, and pulling and tugging at his branches. He returns to laughter and joy. He takes his time adjusting back to human life and plays with the children. One day, he walks back to his father. He is no longer 'ill', but his father's son.

As a tree, the child seeks an existence that is serene, rooted, and unthreatening. This transformation serves as a metaphor for a psychological and existential shift. It represents not only an inner state of being but also a quest for peace, solitude, and independence. In essence, this can be viewed either as a symbolic transformation representing adolescence, or as delusion. One interpretation is that the tree form symbolizes isolation or solitude during adolescence. However, given Sande's focus on themes related to mental health, we veer towards interpreting the boy's experience as a trans delusion. As reviewers, we present both interpretations, though readers may favour one over the other.

The book narrates not only the delusion but also the tale of conversion through therapy imposed on the child/tree. His identification with the plum tree appears to be accepted at the hospital. He forms healthy relationships, sharing his fruits, laughing, and playing. The boy is not ridiculed, nor are his experiences of transforming into a plum tree. He agrees to become human again.

The story is a tapestry of metaphors. The child's metamorphosis depicts the physical and emotional changes of adolescence. The confusion, the humdrum, and the fragility of the situation are well-captured through the disproportionate outgrowths from time to time. The boy's cold place is perhaps redolent of a psychiatric ward and isolation. In Sande's world, the children are inmates of the ward which perhaps never gives up trying to make him better, or rather 'save' him. Perhaps, the adults are the doctors of the psychiatric hospital who rip off his tree identity.

Hans Sande deals with the age-old problem of the difference of opinions between parents and children. The polarity between the father and son is a major concern in the narrative. Even though the father tries to help his child, his efforts do not lead to any change, highlighting the inevitability of change and deviation. Sande emphasizes that the father and son are separate individuals with a need to grow apart. The father proudly displays his son in his tree form but fails to understand his inner self. To the father, the plum tree is something to be proud of, not a menace to be dealt with. There is a lack of involvement from the father. Sande writes, 'Dad didn't listen, so I had to manage on my own.' The narrator questions his father's intentions. The boy is made into a mere display for people to enjoy. Overwhelmed, the child retreats into a state of continued isolation. In the narrative, everything comes to a standstill. The child finds solace in a world of his own.

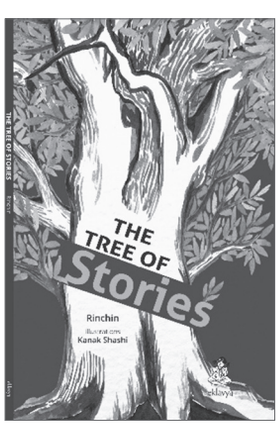
The first page evokes a sense of familiarity, reminiscent of one's childhood feelings, but soon the pathos sets in. The child's transition to other forms of life, defying conventional human identity, is unsettling. Such delusions are often misunderstood or not accepted. The text is not easy to read.

The illustrations by Olav Hagen capture the complexities of the narrative. The intricate pencil colour details add specificities to the changes that the narrator goes through. The depictions help the readers build the visual of a plum tree, a possibly grotesque image, mirroring the inner struggles of the boy. The gaze of the narrative is on the inner world, reflecting on the psyche of the transforming adolescent or the delusional individual. The complex theme of mental life/illness/health is traversed simply by evoking powerful imagery.

Sande tells the tale in the first person, making it insightful and hard-hitting. The narration makes us wax and wane with the boy. The story stays with you long after you put the book down. The poignance of the story is not lost in translation.

Simran Sadh

THE TREE OF STORIES
By Rinchin. Illustrated by Kanak Shashi
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 84, ₹ 100.00



The titular story in the collection, 'The Tree of Stories' serves as a visual metaphor brought to life. The tree embodies how stories grow from their roots, evolving into something new while still carrying the essence of their origins. It also manages to suggest an important idea that stories and narratives can be questioned.

The five short stories in Rinchin's classic narrative style are from the universe of Sabir and her friends. Even so, each story has a fresh perspective and experience to offer while assuming a connectedness with the recurring characters and the flow of events. This interconnectedness does not interfere with experiencing each story in its own light. For instance, the story 'May You All Grow Up to Be' takes a satirical stance on the hypocrisy of

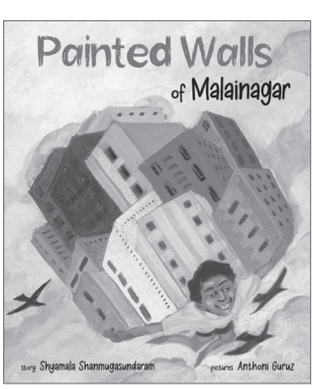
government-imposed initiatives with an element of fantasy highlighting the pitiful situation. 'The Baramasi Jungle' is a story soaked in nostalgia but is an account of displacement and its emotional, cultural, economic and ecological impact on people and future generations.

While each story is a critique of the everyday systemic injustices that the characters withstand, they are not being told to serve this end alone. The experience of reading the stories, both individually and as a collective, can evoke a range of emotions not only on behalf of the characters but also for the reader. The author has created space for humour, anger, frustration, empathy and more. Regional words enrich the language of the story, making it fluid and nuanced, and adding impactful connotations. For example, using '*sarkar*' instead of 'government' indicates an oppressive state.

Personally, these stories bring me closer to children and leave me with mixed feelings about the agency they are seldom able to exercise. The stories are also a glimpse into their creative will which often goes unacknowledged or thwarted in both fictional and classroom settings. Rinchin's dedication note for the book resonates with me— 'For the children who fight, laugh, struggle, give hope and change the world.'

Shailaja Srinivasan

PAINTED WALLS OF MALAINAGAR
By Shyamala Shanmugasundaram. Illustrated by Anthoni Guruz
Tulika Books, Chennai, 2024, pp. 32, ₹ 225.00



When we see what the world is going through right now and what kids are up against, real life is scarier than fiction. Kids cannot choose their environment or the people in it. They do not always have the power and resources to seek out solutions, but they have an appetite, and a real need for stories about survival. The ending does not have to be happy, but the story should inspire to move forward, to persevere, and to endure. The book's characters should believe in themselves, that they'll survive somehow, because readers experience the journey alongside the protagonist, learning with them as they overcome obstacles, win battles, solve mysteries, or move toward a place of hope and understanding.

Shyamala Shanmugasundaram's *Painted Walls of Malainagar* is one such bold and colourful picture book that captures the grim topic of urban decay, and the plight of relocated communities. It draws inspiration from a public art project. Told through the voice of young Soori, the protagonist, Shanmugasundaram sets the context—his family relocated during a slum clearance, moving from a bustling market in the middle of the city to the outskirts—to a rundown, unclean, unsafe, neighborhood, out of sight and forgotten. Trapped by lack of means to escape this dreary reality, Soori, his sister Kala and their mother live in a dull and drab multistoried building. The author weaves in the boy's birthday wish for colourful rain brightening the surroundings as a wonderful connect to a community art project.

More and more cities are investing in public art. Murals are deeply catalytic, transforming dull and neglected spaces into vibrant visually stunning spaces attracting people. Works of public art are used not only for their aesthetic benefits but also to address practical problems like safety. They have the power to transform public spaces and individual lives.

Shanmugasundaram describes the degeneration in simple words: '…the shabby and dull buildings, garbage lying around everywhere and the open drains that smelt foul'. She talks about children not in school, getting into trouble. She goes on to state all the motivations and principles of urban revival and public art in a simple matter of fact way and as conversations between the unnamed artist and Soori.

'"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"I am an artist. My friends and I are going to paint murals in this neighborhood."

"What are murals?"

"Big pictures on the wall. We are going to paint on the walls of these buildings to make them colorful."'

Soori approaches the artist and expresses a desire to paint.

Murals are a collaborative effort—the artist welcomes Soori and his friends to paint together with her and each one of them adds a little something from their lives to create their mural. Shanmugasundaram gently weaves in her story the effects of public art—making people feel represented, fostering community ties, and giving a sense of ownership and belonging in their neighbourhoods; their wants and needs painted several stories high, to help picture what could be so they can help make it happen.

Shanmugasundaram's lucid words are accompanied by Anthoni Guruz's bold, colourful, realistic drawings. Guruz captures the spirit of decaying buildings coming alive with the children painting the murals wonderfully well in his illustrations. The font is clean and appealing in size to read. By pairing this brilliant author and illustrator duo, Tulika has brought out a story-gem!

As the story progresses, it is heartwarming to see Soori's emotions transform from not happy to excited-thrilled. You have to read to find out what happened that Soori can't stop smiling these days!

Soori makes another wish—

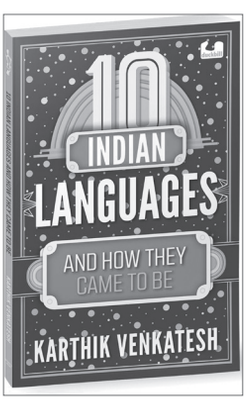
'Maybe the shower of colour would work another magic…

Maybe this would become a clean and safe place too, he thought!'

In Kala Akka's words, 'May Soori's wish come true… again!'

Shiv Narayan Gour

10 INDIAN LANGUAGES AND HOW THEY CAME TO BE
By Karthik Venkatesh
Duckbill Books, 2024, pp. 138, ₹ 199.00



Language is a tool that gives humans the ability to think, reflect and express. Without language, perhaps we would not be able to imagine anything. We would be just like other living beings. All the beauty, all the progress, or one could say, the entire journey of humankind has been made possible because of language. Learning a language is also fascinating—how a child learns her mother tongue while playing, without even realizing it. A five-year-old child knows thousands of words in her language, especially her mother tongue and knows how to use them. Despite the immense importance of language, there are very few books that explore the understanding of language or its nature. Especially for children, such books are even fewer.

In this regard, Karthik Venkatesh's book, *10 Indian Languages and How They Came to Be*, makes a significant effort to fill this gap. Published by Duckbill, this book explores the evolutionary journey of ten languages—Tamil, Telugu, Brahui, Santhali, Khasi, Kokborok, Manipuri, Marathi, Punjabi, and Hindi—among the thousands spoken in India. These ten languages represent four distinct language families: Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, and Indo-Aryan. Venkatesh talks about their origins, the changes they underwent over time, and the overall aspects of language through stories and anecdotes. While discussing these ten languages, the author encourages readers to understand the process of how other languages develop as well. For each language, a timeline chart of its evolution is provided, allowing readers to explore the history of the language in depth.

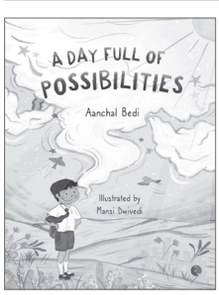
The book also reveals some interesting facts. For instance, we might think that Hinglish (the blending of Hindi and English) emerged with mobile phones, but Venkatesh reveals that Hinglish was used as far back as 1827 in the poems of India's first English poet, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. This whole discussion about Hinglish has been given in the book under the chapter, 'The Story of Hinglish'.

I also found the introduction part of the book quite interesting. In this section, Venkatesh draws our attention to two important aspects of language. The first is the distinction between a language and a dialect. Often, dialects are seen as inferior to languages, much like the divide between wealth and poverty. He points out a common belief that dialects do not have their own script, but this distinction is more political. As Venkatesh explains, even Hindi and English do not have their own original scripts. For this, he quotes Indian linguist George Abraham Grierson, a renowned scholar who made significant contributions to the study and documentation of Indian languages. According to him, the difference between language and dialect is like the difference between the words 'mountain' and 'hill'—both essentially refer to the same thing, with only minor differences.

The second important point raised in the introduction is the death of languages. Venkatesh notes that around 6,000-7,000 languages in the world are on the verge of extinction. This is alarming because the disappearance of a language is not just the loss of words, but the end of an entire knowledge tradition of the speakers' community.

The language of the book is very simple, making the complexity of language easy to understand, which is a testament to Venkatesh's skill. The book is useful not only for scholars deeply studying languages but also for the general reader, offering an opportunity to understand themselves better. Young readers will find this book fascinating.

Book News ***Book News***

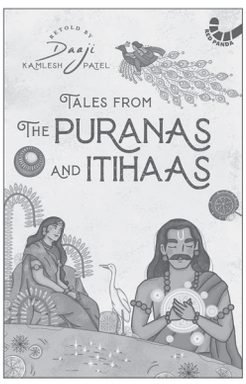


A Day Full of Possibilities by Aanchal Bedi is the story of Neil who uses a magical question to transform mundane and unfavourable situations into exciting, adventure-filled ones. Embark on this wonderful journey with him and see what is possible for you!

Rupa Publications, 2024, pp.16, ₹ 195.00

Toolika Wadhwa

TALES FROM THE PURANAS AND ITIHAAS
Retold by Kamlesh Patel ('Daaji'). Edited by Purnima Ramakrishnan. Illustrated by Gayatri Pachpande
Red Panda, An Imprint of Westland Books, 2023, pp. 124, ₹ 250.00



Children growing up in the information age have quick and easy access to events around the world, opinions about them and a multitude of perspectives. In the world of post truths, access to 'knowledge' needs to be accompanied with the ability to discern fact from fiction, personal opinion from community-based perspectives, and critiques from propaganda. These abilities do not develop through mere reading of textbooks but through education in values and life skills. Educators argue for values and life skills to be integrated into the various disciplinary subjects. However, there is merit in going beyond disciplinary subjects and textbooks. Teaching through stories holds a lot of appeal particularly for engaging children. This is equally meaningful for home and school.

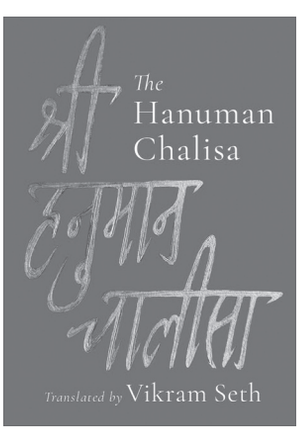
The collection of stories presented in this book have been carefully selected from the Puranas. Many of the characters in the stories would be familiar to children through reference to mythology in Indian homes. Through rituals, spiritual songs, and animated shows, children come across stories of various Hindu gods and demi-gods, including the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesha; Lord Ganesha, and the other *avatars*: Rama and Krishna. Familiarity with their symbolic form and the stories of their great feats fill the children with awe. Magical fantasies and curiosity which children experience give way to scepticism as they grow up. The stories seem far from believable and are relegated to the past. However, there is deeper merit in children learning these stories. Puranas serve the valuable purpose of connecting children to our religious and cultural roots. In addition, they also hold the strong potential of developing values and life skills through references to characters that hold a loving appeal to children.

In retelling Puranic stories for children, the author Kamlesh Patel—better known as Daaji—has simplified the language as well as taken away the complexity of situations. While this may be subject to criticism and debate (for it reduces stories and characters to polar opposites of good or bad, removing the shades of grey), such a retelling is helpful in culling out insights for life skills and value education. Each story is followed by a synopsis of the value that can be drawn from the story. These range from perseverance, flexibility, anger management, courage, unconditional love, living in the moment, rightness in action and character building. The graphics in the stories and the subsequent synopsis of values hold strong appeal for children.

The book promises to be a useful resource for teachers engaging with toddlers and pre-teens. Parents can also use this book to initiate conversations on abstract ideas with children. The stories can be read out to the children verbatim. Older children may read the stories themselves as the language is simple and easy to comprehend. It is appreciable that the illustrations have distinctly Indian tones and colours instead of the westernized cartoons that children are exposed to. This will also create a lasting impression in the minds of children. The pages referring to the values can be revisited by children whenever they come across a similar situation in their lives.

Ann Susan Aleyas

THE HANUMAN CHALISA
Translated by Vikram Seth
Speaking Tiger Books, 2024, pp. 100, ₹ 399.00



After what seems to have been a publishing hiatus of over a decade, Vikram Seth makes his re-entry into our reading shelves through his wonderful translation of *The Hanuman Chalisa*. Vikram Seth, who is one of the renowned contemporary voices of Indian writings in English, gained global recognition in 1993 through his novel *A Suitable Boy*, which is perhaps the longest Indian novel written in English thus far. Apart from his literary contributions to the canon of Indian novels, Seth is also a poet who has published several anthologies—for all of which he was honored with the Padma Shri, the Sahitya Akademi Award, and other prestigious recognitions. With the current work of *The Hanuman Chalisa*, Seth turns a new leaf in the direction of translation.

The much-beloved sacred hymn of *The Hanuman Chalisa* was composed by Tulsidas in the sixteenth century and continues to hold sway over the life and

faith of millions of devotees to date. *The Hanuman Chalisa* ('*Chalisa*' meaning 'Fortyverser') is addressed to the Hindu deity Hanuman, invoking his many mythical roles and cherished traits such as those of a devotee of Ram, a warrior, protector, remover of obstacles, and more, by devotees to seek his blessings, fortitude, timely intervention and solace during all stages of life. Through his translation of this sacred hymn to English, Vikram Seth seeks to make accessible the knowledge embedded in *The Hanuman Chalisa* which was originally composed by Tulsidas in Awadhi to the English-speaking world.

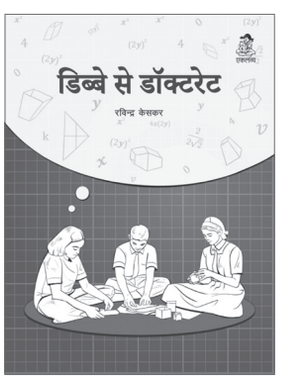
This translation is a bilingual undertaking in which the verses in the Devanagari script appear along with its simple transliteration in the Roman script, followed by, on the next page, the translation of these verses in English. All of the forty-three rhymed couplets—including three *dohas* and forty *chaupais*—are thoughtfully placed in this manner to align the textual translation with their incantational quality. As Vikram Seth explains in his introductory note, this translation seeks to maintain the rhyme and meter of the original verses as best possible in English, so that the English speaker may experience the sonic pleasures of these poetic verses as they sound in Awadhi.

However, Seth is acutely aware of the many limitations inherent in the process of translation which is after all an ongoing quest for equivalences between two or more languages which are different worlds in themselves. The difficulty of carrying over the musical echoes and alliterations of the original Awadhi text into the English language which does not have as many falling meters and feminine rhymes is one such palpable challenge the translator makes note of. Another aspect of interest in this translation is the curious absence of footnotes or endnotes which are conventionally employed by translators to supply the readers with etymological or contextual connotations of words or phrases which may otherwise be lost in translation; Seth, however, consciously veers clear of this convention in the interest of simplicity and approachability. On the whole, through his careful attention to the rhythm, rhyme, and religio-cultural resonances of the Awadhi text, Vikram Seth pleasurably and deftly carries over the cherished hymn to English through this translation.

A small yet interesting detail that further attends to this translation is its dedication—Vikram Seth dedicates this work to Bhaskar, a fictional character from *A Suitable Boy*, who at a very young age had ardently learnt this poem and had also participated in the Ramlila festivities in Brahmpur in the role of one of Hanuman's monkey soldiers. It may be worthwhile to note that this intertextual gesture finds precedence in the Hindi translation of *A Suitable Boy* by Ram Gandhi, which Seth had dedicated to yet another character in his work: Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor. Such delightful minutiae certainly add to the charm and beauty of this translational enterprise which otherwise opens a window into the religiously and affectively loaded hymn of *The Hanuman Chalisa*. As Vikram Seth himself notes in his introduction, and during several of his interviews, in the current climate of communitarian politics and religious jingoism during which the image of Hanuman has been appropriated many a times to serve narrow and divisive interests, *The Hanuman Chalisa* hopes to serve as a reminder of 'the humanity and inclusivity of the best of Hinduism'.

Amit Kulshrestha

DIBBE SE DOCTORATE
By Ravindra Keskar. Illustrated by Amit Vandole
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 76, ₹ 180.00



Dibbe se Doctorate by Ravindra Keskar is a delightful and truly 'out-of-the-box' exploration of mathematics through the lens of curiosity and experimentation. By the end, the book also appreciates abstraction. At first glance, the reader may perceive it as a book on origami. However, that is not the case. The author uses an exercise in origami as a starting point to take readers on an engaging journey where initial ideas, followed by experiments and proper recordkeeping, ultimately lead to the necessity of abstraction.

The book begins with the author's reflections on his own education, and the lack of experiential learning in mathematics during his school days. This sets the stage for the reader to understand his motivation. Much later in his career, as an engineering teacher, Keskar received a government fellowship during which, and even later, he conducted workshops on teaching mathematics across rural and semi-rural India, as well as in some IITs. These experiences further shaped his passion for presenting mathematics in an innovative and accessible manner.

The book's narrative kicks off with a simple yet engaging exercise in origami: creating a box from a flat square sheet using only folds–no cutting or pasting involved. The first three chapters focus on this exercise. The language is interactive and the illustrations are clear and easy to follow. The first curious question to follow this activity—what is the volume of such a box? From this simple inquiry, the book expands into a broader exploration.

Chapters four to eight focus on the concept of volume, guiding the reader through experiments and systematic recordkeeping to understand how changes in dimensions affect volume. These chapters emphasize the importance of hands-on learning, where conclusions are drawn from practical experimentation. In chapter nine, the discussion transitions to algebraic functions and basic geometry, while graphs are used to visually represent the results of the earlier experiments.

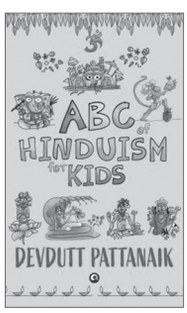
Chapter ten stands out as a pivotal point in the book. Here, the author addresses the abstract nature of mathematics, quoting ET Bell: 'Abstractness, sometimes hurled as a reproach at mathematics, is its chief glory and its surest title to practical usefulness. It is also the source of such beauty as may spring from mathematics.' This chapter highlights the importance of abstraction in both the theory and practice of mathematics.

The theme of abstraction continues in chapters eleven to thirteen, where the earlier problem of maximizing the volume is revisited with the power of abstraction and graphs. In the last two chapters, the author emphasizes upon the role of imagination in mathematics. He encourages readers to explore boxes of various shapes and to ask questions to continue their own trail from experimentation to abstraction to answers.

One of the book's strengths is its accessible language that keeps the reader engaged throughout. The author frequently draws examples from Bollywood movies, creating interesting connections between mathematical thinking and everyday life! These examples not only make the content more relatable but also add a touch of humor, and bring a smile to the reader's face.

Dibbe se Doctorate achieves its goal of showcasing curiosity-based learning in mathematics. It is an excellent resource for anyone interested in exploring how mathematical knowledge can be constructed through inquiry and experimentation. This book will appeal to readers of all ages, starting from 12 years old. The book's approach is refreshing. More such works should find their way into the hands of learners and educators alike.

Book News ***Book News***

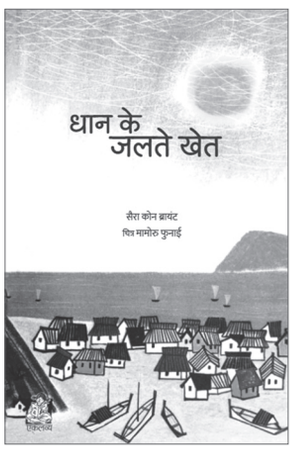


ABC of Hinduism for Kids by Devdutt Pattanaik reimagines a Hindu way for young readers. Covering everything from major Hindu deities such as Brahma, the creator of the universe, and Devi, the powerful goddess who takes many forms, to complicated ideas of atma and the caste system, this book explores twenty-six ideas and figures from Hindu myth, each corresponding to a letter of the alphabet.

Aleph Book Company, 2024, pp. 72, ₹379.00

Aniket Chouhan

DHAAN KE JALTE KHET
By Sarah Cone Bryant. Illustrated by Mamoru Funai.
Translated from the original Japanese by Arvind Gupta
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 24, ₹ 55.00



Dhaan Ke Jalte Khet (The Burning Rice Fields), a famous traditional Japanese folktale rewritten by Sara Cone Bryant is based on a true event that happened in 1854. This story was first published by Greek-Japanese author Patrick Lafcadio Hearn in his book *Gleanings in Buddha Fields*. Sara Cone Bryant, born in 1873, was an American writer, journalist, activist and an educator, best known for her work in children's literature. After she rewrote the story, it was published as a picture book.

The protagonist is an old man who looks after the rice fields that sustain the coastal fishing village situated at the foot of the hill. While the people lived in a village, the old man and his grandson lived on the mountain top. One day, the old man burnt all the rice fields, which was a terrifying incident for the grandson. Thick black smoke started rising from the mountain. Seeing this, the villagers ran quickly and climbed the mountain to save the rice fields. When they reached the top of the hill, they asked, 'Who did this? How did this happen?'. 'I set the fields on fire,' the old man said.

When I read this story, it raised many questions in my mind. Like why was rice cultivated on the mountains? The village was located near the sea; why did the villagers not cultivate at the foot of the mountain? Was there cultivation on the mountains of Japan? These questions increased my curiosity, so I read this story again slowly, and with great interest.

This story is set in a coastal Japanese village and the high point of drama is the old man's daring decision to burn the precious rice fields. Bryant uses simple structures and has carefully crafted this story that captures many dimensions of a Japanese coastal village into the narrative—like the economy, society, natural disasters, emotions and morality—creating a story that resonates across cultures and time.

Mamoru Funai has illustrated this book beautifully. The illustrations add even more power to the story. They direct the reader's mind to imagine through pictures and colours. The pictures depict the serene beauty of the

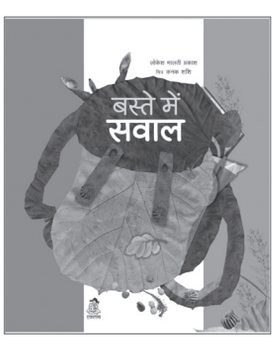
Japanese landscape and the fear of impending disaster, making the emotional stakes of the story even higher.

The most interesting aspect of the story is the natural disaster. The old man points to the sea and says, 'Look!'. When they looked, no one was screaming; the scene was horrific—from the top of the hill they could see a wall of water approaching…a tsunami! There was water everywhere.

This story also explores internal conflict aspects of the old man's decision, how to handle the same, and making decisions during a crisis. The act of burning rice fields was very bold and the old man had to be very brave to take a decision like that. When the fire broke out, the villagers climbed up the hill and ran as fast as they could to save them—responding to their instinct to protect their shared resources, where they ended up in turn saving the most precious resource of the village–the lives of all those living in it.

Laltu

BASTE MEIN SAWAAL
By Lokesh Malti Prakash. Illustrated by Kanak Shashi
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 20, ₹ 75.00



'*Sawaal*', an innocuous word meaning a query, is perhaps the most apparent to all conscious beings, and yet the most terrifying to some who once enthroned, wish to never let the power go and stick to it by hook or by crook. Lokesh Malti Prakash weaves a beautiful tale of a child discovering an unanswered question lying in her bag and sharing it with her peer, which are the multiple and diverse entities in Nature that only a child can fully perceive. With illustrations of high quality building a parallel fantasia like resonance, the tale flows smoothly in a poetic ecstasy. Reading *Baste Mein Sawaal***,** one is reminded of the images in the timeless poetry of Shamsher Bahadur Singh, the laureate who asked in his own aesthetic style the same questions that this tale of a forlorn *Sawaal* ends up gathering near its end–questions on the self-destructive path chosen by mankind, questions on bigotry and hate, the difference being that this time it is all on the tongue of a child. We see Shalabh Shriram Singh joining us with his perennial song–S*awaal dar sawaal hai, hamein jawaab chahiye* (we want answers to each question that follows other questions). The story ends up in an assortment of questions marching for a transformation, and in this sense, it presents a benchmark on how stories must be written for children today. A child today looks up solutions for questions on the internet; the old fairy tales must be replaced with new varieties of imagination. The ancient formats that merely oriented the child towards language and skill development must be supplemented with thoughts on contemporary realities. The point is not that facts are to be imposed on a young mind, rather one must find ways to create novel fantasies with new colours and with freshness. It is a difficult task and Lokesh has done a great job of it. The development of each character is natural and spontaneous, and the reader gets absorbed in the make-believe world, almost as if living in a parallel universe of a joyous consciousness. And all this with a purpose–we must ask meaningful and necessary questions that will one day change this world for a better future.

The story addresses the conflict between the adult world that wants to control and regiment the children who have countless questions full of wonder and imagination. The children must not take the question freed from the confines of the bag to adults, rather they take it to other beings that are free of control; for instance, a crow, and they compile more questions that must be asked. Predictably the adult world of rule and control, the system and the administration, is weary of this development. But the seekers must not give up and the questioning must continue.

The book is designed exceptionally well. Lokesh's choice of words is well thought yet so earthly, and it will certainly attract readers in the entire Hindi-speaking world. The illustrations are bright, imaginative and they demand a careful look. For its size, the book is very reasonably priced and within affordable range of ordinary readers. Kudos to Eklavya for such a fine selection and surely, this comes from all children who are constantly being told, against what Nature desires, that they must not ask *Sawaal*.

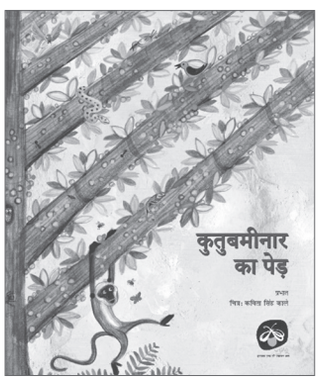
Book News ***Book News***

Chambers Book of Football: Facts by Swayam Ganguly is a ticket to the exhilarating world of football that will resonate with football fans, sports aficionados and novices alike. It gives you essential information and all the legendary tales, epic rivalries and astonishing trivia that are there to the sport.

Hatchette India, 2024, pp. 320, ₹ 499.00

Vivek Singh Thakur

QUTUBMINAR KA PED
By Prabhat. Illustrated by Kavita Singh Kale
Jugnoo Prakashan, an Imprint of Ektara Trust, 2023,
pp. 38, ₹ 140.00



Qutubminar Ka Ped is a collection of six stories embedded with captivating illustrations. Through his remarkable storytelling, Prabhat brings these stories to life. Every character and situation in the book feel so real that readers can instantly connect with them. The book's title immediately draws the reader's attention, not just because it references the famous historical Qutub Minar, but also because it imaginatively transforms it into a tree.

Prabhat uses symbols like the tiger, sheep, jamun, and mango to convey profound philosophical ideas. One story, for instance, celebrates the concept of a lamb getting left behind with her mother, presenting a perspective that challenges conventional beliefs; while another story portrays a child obsessed with mangoes who reasons with great curiosity why the culprit should rope a mango tree.

The hallmark of Prabhat's writing style is the simplicity and ease of his storytelling, which takes readers straight back to their childhood. The length of the stories does not diminish their essence; instead, it makes them more concise and impactful. Each story is a precious gem in itself, illuminating the complexities and beauty of the human mind.

The strongest aspect of this book lies in its illustrations, beautifully crafted by Kavita Singh Kale. The illustrations breathe life into the stories. Whether it's the relaxed attitude of Ammi-Abbu, the tiger peeking out from the well, or the crow's love for the Minar, each image elevates the imagination of the readers and keeps them connected to the story. Kavita Singh has not only brought the stories to life but has also added a sensitivity and emotional depth to them. Every illustration fully conveys the essence of the story and helps the reader engage more deeply.

The full-length illustration on the cover page, though not directly used inside the stories, is a brilliant piece of art. It aligns wonderfully with the title and presents a delightful tree teeming with a vibrant ecosystem. This illustration reflects a beautiful blend of nature and emotions, which enhances the book's appeal even further.

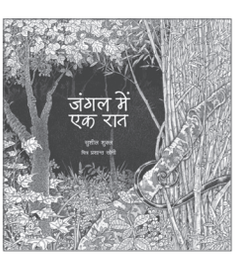
Prabhat's storytelling is commendable for its ability to make inanimate objects come alive with emotions and meaning. He transforms a lifeless Minar into a tree with enchanting branches, where Kavita Singh's illustrations weave an entire ecosystem. The narrative's ability to use ordinary objects like trees, fruits, and animals to reflect human emotions makes the book universally relatable.

While the stories might appear simple, they carry a depth that lingers. The stories are written in such a way that they take you on a journey–one moment you are laughing with the characters, and the next, you are pondering on the deeper meanings of life.

Qutubminar Ka Ped is not just for children but a delightful read for adults as well. The unique blend of Prabhat's storytelling and Kavita Singh's illustrations makes it a memorable book, one that can be read again and again.

Nidhi Qazi

JUNGLE MEIN EK RAAT
By Sushil Shukl. Illustrated by Prashant Soni
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 24, ₹ 60.00



Meaning is something amorphous, something so unreachable sometimes. And as a reader, one does feel the need to crack 'meaning' first, the need to 'feel' than taking a backseat. A creation like जंगल में एक रात, thus throws an open invitation to the reader to place the need to feel and cherish the words, the metaphors, the wholeness and soul-searching a jungle has to offer.

Sushil Shukl's creation marvels at the world of forest in a 16-line poetry which invites the readers to open their eyes to not the brightness of mornings and light, but the sharpness and stillness of nights and the accompanying darkness. The poem celebrates stillness of nights in a forest; it shuns the shrillness of light in our everyday lives outside a jungle in lines like:

उजालों में अपना बहुत शोरगुल है
बहुत देख लेने का बजता बिगुल है

These lines also carry an awareness about the pride humans take in 'seeing'; what if how we see isn't actually seeing? What if humans need to see this world more closely, observe more keenly and then perhaps claim 'seeing the world', rather than a false pompous sense of having 'seen this world'.

Lines like—

हर आवाज़ को रात ने सुनके लपका
कि पत्ता अभी एक जामुन से टपका
ये खरगौी ने कुतर घास ली है
सुनो कोई चींटी कहीं सांस ली है

are reminiscent of Kabir's ideas on the universal force, the Holy one in his couplet, 'कीड़ी के पग नेवर बाजे सो भी साहब सुनता है'. The forest's stillness paves way for such minute sounds and sights which go amiss in the mundane existence. And the mundane can become mindful if such sights and sounds can be paid attention to.

This poem brings various sights, sounds, beingness together in its fresh usage of words and creation of metaphors like 'उजालों से एकदम बरी, अंधेरों से जुलकर, उजालों से छलनी रात'. It is this usage that brings light and darkness into such vibrant existence and renders them life. So much so that both these phenomena actually feel like real, within the reach experiences which humans take for granted.

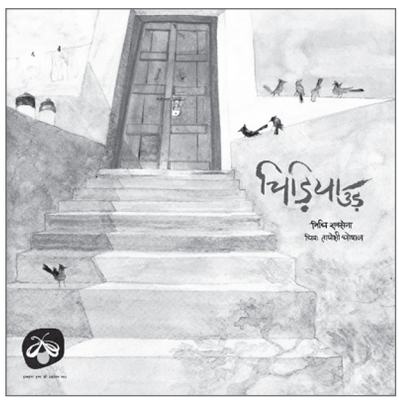
In his creations, Sushil not only pays attention to and reveres the magnificence of nature, he also questions the human sensibilities and pride by bringing new imageries that pump so much life that nature almost emerges as a potent entity which needs our attention. In his other creations like यह सारा उजाला सूरज का (Eklavya), मछली नदी खोलकर बैठी (Eklavya), and वो पेड़ पर नहीं चलती (Ektara), he births new ways of seeing, meaning-making, and poetry, and this creation also carries these same qualities.

Just like the poetry that flows, the illustrations by Prashant Soni also bring to life the contours of a night; the tiger's movement and rested walk around the space of its being; the innumerable creatures of wildness; the night skies full of darkness and moonlight, the fireflies and butterflies dancing away to the silence of night. All of this invite the reader to the world of forest. This world is unique, as the poem tells us; we can experience this uniqueness, this poem assures us.

CHIDIYA UDD
By Nidhi Saxena. Illustrated by Taposhi Ghoshal
Jugnoo Prakashan, an Imprint of Ektara Trust, 2023, pp. 8, ₹ 50.00

What does it mean to be different in this world where one is expected to behave the 'same'? What happens when one tries being among the 'same'? What if one belongs to the 'same' as it deems the 'same', and not the 'same' as prescribed by those around?

Nidhi Saxena urges us to feel, look and immerse ourselves into the world of Amol and leaves us with these questions, of which there seem to be no easy, linear answers. A gut-churning melancholy, running page after page, *Chidiya Udd* follows Amol and the difficulty he faces in his life. The difficulty is that Amol wants to fly since he doesn't belong with the humans; he feels like a bird within. While the grandmother is able to understand Amol's pain, she can't do much. His father ignores Amol's difficulty in accepting an identity that Amol does not relate to. Amol doesn't feel human; he is a bird, he assures. But no one will let him be one.



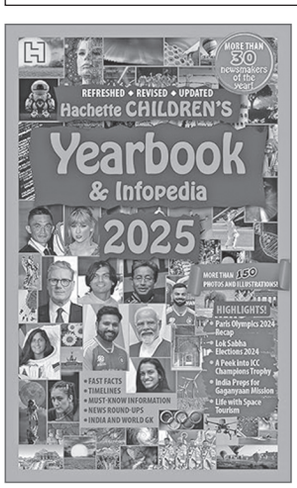
Taposhi's real-life, sensitive use of colours are easy on the eyes; there is a dream-like quality in the illustrations that also perhaps reflects Amol's inner world which keeps harping on that one dream—of becoming one with his kind.

The title of the book is taken from one of the moments in Amol's life where he is playing the game of '*Chidiya Udd*' with his friends. This title stayed, echoing the freedom Amol desired and the quashing of that desire.

This book is complex and reminds us how life is—where the simple and complex struggle to coexist. *Chidiya Udd* also reminds us of the implications of the stubbornness this society doesn't budge from; where norms are sacrosanct and there's no space for individual dreams and desires, where the society regresses and regrets but doesn't change its course.

Nidhi tells the story of Amol in the most sensitive ways, bringing in empathy and kindness and not taking sides. She leaves it up to the reader to feel Amol's poignant tale. A must-read for teachers, parents, would-be-parents and basically all of us who want to make children's lives better but may not know where to begin.

Book News ***Book News***

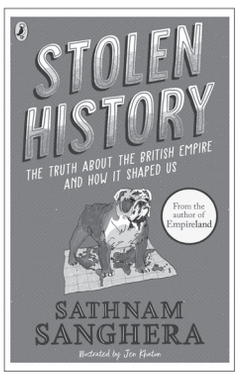


Hachette Children's Yearbook and Infopedia 2025 is the ultimate reference book with fun, interesting and absolutely essential information. From important news to notable events, from current affairs to scientific breakthroughs, and from latest developments to necessary stats and facts – this book has it all!

Hachette India, 2024, pp. 224, ₹ 399.00

TCA Raghavan

STOLEN HISTORY: THE TRUTH ABOUT THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND HOW IT SHAPED US
By Sathnam Sanghera
Puffin Books, An Imprint of Penguin/ Random House, 2023, pp. 208, ₹ 300.00



Imperialism and colonialism as matters of contestation and debate have to a large extent withdrawn from our mental world in India. This is not because their inequities are forgotten or overlooked, rather there is a consensus around their exploitative, racist and unjust quality which is taken as a given—explaining the absence of debate. In Britain however, the idea of empire as something benevolent is persistent. Nostalgic and celebratory accounts of imperialism abound.

About two decades ago, this post-imperial coda found strong expression in historian Niall Ferguson's book and TV series, *Empire*. Without glossing over its darker episodes, to Ferguson the British Empire merited being invoked positively because it propagated and established modern values essential for the world's development. The US must now pick up imperial Britain's mantle—this was in the context of US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan; and once their trajectory became clear, the pushback against such Ferguson-type arguments was also strong.

More recently, imperial apologia cum celebration has found expression by Oxford Professor Nigel Bigger who in his book, *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning* (2023) argued that there is a strong moral case in favour of the British Empire: there is no need to be guilty about its failings since it was in effect, a force for the good. Again, pushback against this was strong but the debate has been vigorous and the equivalent of a culture war, much like the thrust and cut over Black Lives Matter in the United States.

Sathnam Sanghera's *Stolen History* is only partly informed by this debate for and against Britain's imperial past. The problem that he identifies and addresses as being more important is in essence that while Empire is ubiquitous in Britain today, not enough is known about it: '…There's an incredibly interesting slice of history which I wasn't taught about at school or University—the British Empire. It's a part of history that is still important to life as we know it today. It explains so much about Britain as a nation, including where some of our money comes from, the stuff we find in our museums, the reason the country is home to citizens of all different races and backgrounds, the food we eat, the words we use and so much more.'

All this is what *Stolen History* is about. This little book is really a retelling for children of a larger history book for adults entitled *Empireland*.

Sanghera's story, engagingly related and with some arresting illustrations, thus takes the reader through the East India Company, the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, Tea, Colonial loot and 'stolen' objects in British museums, the Koh-i Noor and personages such as Walter Raleigh, Robert Clive, Mahatma Gandhi, Rudyard Kipling, the colonial and slave connections of Liverpool and Bristol, etc.

Why, Sanghera asks, is all this not better known? To an extent he says because the Empire caused so much suffering and cruelty, it is a subject often best left alone and selective amnesia is therefore widespread and convenient. Introducing it in school curricula was also problematic because the subject is deeply divisive, since many still feel Britain's empire was something positive. In his words:

'But I think that viewing the British Empire through the idea of pride or shame is not useful. The problem with these pro-Empire and anti-Empire arguments is that there is no middle ground, no space to say, "it's complicated", or "I'm not sure". This kind of division also means that schools find it easier to avoid the subject entirely and just decide to teach the history of the Tudors or the Hundred Years War again and again instead. What we need to do is to try to understand what occurred, and think about how that shaped us and continues to impact us today. What we don't need to do is come to a final conclusion about whether the British Empire was good or bad.'

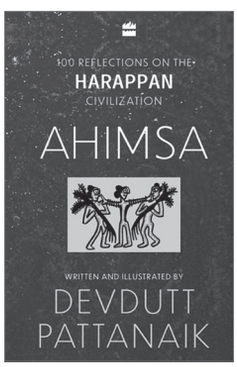
To some such a clinical approach may appear the best method to navigate their way through Britain's culture wars involving Brexit, immigration, and racism, etc. But the point also is that the debate about Empire in Britain today is not so much about the past as it is about contemporary issues that face the country, and it is often not easy to be clinical about them—especially for those from former British colonies living in Britain today.

It is to that extent a very British debate and young readers in India may not find it easy or straightforward to pin point its relevance to them. The Empire viewed from India and viewed from within Britain can be two very different things. That second generation and third generation immigrants like Sanghera are retelling its story from a different perspective is very much part of their establishing deeper roots and feeling at home in their parents' and grandparents' chosen country of residence.

PK Basant

AHIMSA: 100 REFLECTIONS ON THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION
By Devdutt Pattanaik. Illustrated by Devdutt Pattanaik
HarperCollins India, 2024, pp. 272, ₹ 499.00

'Like the Druzes, like the moon, like death, like next week, the distant past is one of those things that can enrich ignorance. It is infinitely malleable and agreeable, far more obliging than the future and far less demanding of our efforts. It is the famous season favoured by all mythologies.' –Jorge Luis Borges (*I, a Jew*)



Devdutt Pattanaik, known for his delightful retellings of the Mahabharata, Ramayana and myriad other stories, periodically wanders into history. *100 Reflections on the Harappan Civilization: Ahimsa,* also illustrated by Pattanaik, intended for the 'general public', is a collection of a large number of sketches mostly inspired by Harappan seals and sealings followed by explanations so that 'facts' and 'interpretation' are seamlessly merged. Organized in bullet points, the book covers a variety of themes including the unverified idea that the Harappans were primarily traders, 'probably regulated by monks who valorised restraint... chose stories rather than violence to get people to collaborate'. He also covers issues like resource mobilization to understand the economic structure of the civilization. We learn how lapis lazuli, a semi-precious stone, was processed in Shortugai, a Harappan settlement close to the river Oxus in Afghanistan, then transported to coastal towns like Lothal and Sutkagan-dor, and thence to the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. Long-distance trade brought together diverse worlds that differed in language, culture and political structure.

Issues which are usually overlooked, such as flora and fauna, the architecture of Harappan homes, what the people wore, and what they ate, are described with competence and care. The reader learns that town planning, weights and measures, seals, bricks, pottery and script showed unity while religious beliefs and rituals indicated diversity and difference. The concluding sections discuss the end of the civilization, and, more remarkably, what survives from Harappa. In other words, he discusses 'how Harappan are we?' Worship of mother goddesses and the god Shiva are some of the traditions which, he claims, survive. He points to the fact that focus on the Vedic tradition has led to missing out on the diversity and difference that is the hallmark of the Harappan civilization.

Considering that the word Ahimsa is written in large typeface on the cover, one would not be wrong in expecting that the book would explore the idea of nonviolence in the Harappan civilization. Nothing of the kind. We are told that some Sumerian and Egyptian myths and artworks celebrate violence. On the other hand, the ramparts of the Harappans were not quite forbidding enough for Pattanaik. He points to the paucity of finds of weapons from Harappan settlements, and lack of depiction of warfare on the pots, pans and seals that have survived. But he has himself sketched an arrowhead, an axe-blade, a spearhead, a dagger-head and a bone-handled razor. Some of these were certainly weapons of war. Scholars have speculated that the large numbers of sling balls found during excavations at Harappan sites might have been used in battle.

Pattanaik interprets a particular Harappan seal as a woman trying to prevent warriors from attacking each other, and assumes that it is a depiction of a myth which indicates a lack of drive for violence. And since myths are supposed to unravel the deep structures of our minds, he argues that Indians were peace loving while violence was the fate of Egyptians and Mesopotamians! Historians are wary of such generalizations. Cleo, the Muse of History, demands that her adherents follow certain rules though these may make the discipline somewhat flat and colourless. For historians, therefore, myths are historical categories which are invented and may be forgotten. No one remembers the epic of Gilgamesh in Iraq today. Historians hold that ideas and practices are context-dependent. Otherwise, wild assertions can be upheld if you are unmoored in time.

Take, for example, the defining theme, Ahimsa. There are illustrations (by the author-artist) of animal sacrifice. Is killing a buffalo or a goat or a fish violence? Jainism, Buddhism, and Brahmanism in many contexts, would consider it so. The author has sketched an 1,800 metre-long wall in Harappa that would have taken about 1,500 people four months to build. This is but one of numerous monumental structures of Harappan towns, all of which would have required huge mobilization of labour by the rulers. If that is not violence, what is? Urban societies are predicated on the idea of the state which itself has been defined as an institution with monopoly over the use of violence. Further, many Harappan urban centres were built over the debris of pre-existing settlements that had been burnt. While these could be the result of accidental fires, the frequency of its occurrence might indicate deliberate destruction.

Nonviolence as a crucial conceptual category is probably a product of the sixth century BCE when traditions like Buddhism and Jainism emerged. Besides, the idea might be mobilized differently in different

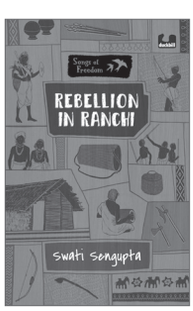
contexts. After all, Kharavela, who boasted, in the famous Hathigumpha inscription, about his victories in war, was a Jain. Some of the most violent contemporary regimes are led by Buddhists. In India today, we tirelessly glorify our ancient past and the ideals of tolerance and nonviolence and, yet, have spawned a society that is increasingly violent and intolerant.

Historians avoid generalizations that relate to the world of ideas of pre- and proto- literate communities where they have to make inferences from material remains. They talk to not only their 'facts', but converse with archaeologists and scholars from a variety of disciplines. While making connections is crucial to the discipline of history, caution is necessary for archaeological finds that are diverse and might have very little connection with each other. This book, on the other hand, merrily melds (admittedly lovely sketches of) artefacts that have been found in different places and different archaeological layers.

Strangely enough, the Archaeological Survey of India is described as the Archaeological Society of India! It would come as a surprise to all trained historians to learn that Pali sources describe Alexander's invasions and conquests.

Nidhi Gulati and Shivi

REBELLION IN RANCHI (SERIES: SONGS OF FREEDOM)
By Swati Sengupta
Duckbill Books, 2024, pp. 105, ₹ 199.50



Rebellion in Ranchi explores the lives of children across India during colonial times. The protagonist, Sibu, provides a lens into the plight of children in the forests of Chota Nagpur, slowly moving into the Tana Bhagat Movement, where they protest the injustices that the zamindars and the British Raj perpetrate on the Adivasis. In 1914, Jatra Oraon declared that the God of the Oraons Dharmesh had sent him a divine message. All Oraons had to become his disciples and follow what Dharmesh revealed. Chanting mantras, he urged the Oraon religion to be purged of evils like ghost hunting, belief in spirits, alcohol and sacrifice of animals. He advocated for people to give up working as labourers and stop paying rent to the landlord. He assured that Dharmesh would sustain them if they followed the path, claiming that a single rice grain could satiate hunger, and a handful scattered on the ground would yield enough to fill a granary. All Oraons had to cleanse themselves by casting household items, farming tools, and jewellery into rivers (Dasgupta, 2016).

Swati Sengupta, a gender rights educator and author, pens this sensitive tale about the native land of Kurukhs. The tale sings the lament of the indigenous people—the land which is theirs, controlled by someone else. It also highlights the prevalent stereotypes that they live with and their consistent need for a saviour or a messiah. It is a captivating and meticulously researched account that dives deep into the socio-political dynamics of the Indian subcontinent back in colonial times. While highlighting something alarming at the macroscopic level, it also uses microcosm to bring forth the lives of tribals. Rice is a luxury in Kurukh. Even as they are clear that the British are their enemies and the ones who exploit them, there is a solemn belief in someone called 'German Baba', who will come and save them from their misery.

The portrayal of the Tana Bhagat Movement from 1914 to 1925 echoes many aspects of the earlier Birsa Movement, creating an intriguing sense of historical continuity. Both movements have similar spiritual foundations and beginnings. Just as Birsa received divine inspiration from Singbonga, the supreme god of the Munda people, the text vividly describes how Jatra Oraon experiences a similar revelation from Dharmesh. The stark parallel will draw the reader in, highlighting the deep-rooted spiritual nature of tribal resistance movements.

The book takes a deep dive into the origin of the Tana Bhagat Movement, and it taking form and shape. This is done from Sibu's point of view. The book paints a compelling picture of the Tana Bhagats, followers of the new religious sect within the Oraon community. We read about their initial meetings that focus on a commitment to an ascetic lifestyle, abstaining from non-vegetarian food and alcohol, and abandoning the worship of spirits and animal sacrifices. Sibu's father, initially an alcoholic and a violent man, is a wanderer who undergoes a 180-degree change in his demeanour after he begins to attend meetings. This serves as a reminder of how religious reform, at times, intertwines with social and political change. Jatra's call to stop ploughing fields, refuse rent payments to landlords, and cease working as labourers for zamindars or non-tribals will resonate with the reader. It illustrates the Movement's stance against economic exploitation and social injustice.

The narrative takes an interesting turn towards the end with the introduction of the now young adult, Sibu Oraon in 1919. His leadership breathed new life into the Movement, relaxing some of the stricter rules and broadening the scope of their resistance. He targeted the exploitative groups like Brahmins, Rajputs, Banias, Marwaris, and particularly noteworthy Mussalmans, as it shows the Movement's evolution from a purely religious reform to a more political and social revolution. The Tana

Bhagat Movement later aligned with the Indian National Congress from 1921 onwards. The Tana Bhagats' participation in the Noncooperation Movement forms the link between their local struggle and the broader national fight for Independence.

From the text, we glean the different aspects of the Movement. Tana Bhagats advocated for freeing Oraon religion from practices like ghost hunts, exorcism, animal sacrifices, and liquor consumption. They promoted vegetarianism, austerity, and restraint among its followers. As the Movement progressed, it developed into a 'no-rent payment' campaign, questioning the subordination of Oraons to zamindars, moneylenders, and the British state. The Tana Bhagats traced their oppression and economic hardship to the historical shift in their agricultural practices. They believed that their transition from nomadic cultivation to settled plough-based farming had created the conditions for their subordination and loss of autonomy. This change in lifestyle, in their view, had made them vulnerable to exploitation and control by others, ultimately leading to their current state of subjugation and poverty (Dasgupta, 2014).

The Movement gradually acquired political flavour, initially attempting to develop a collective Oraon identity, and later, anti-British and anti-missionary stances and participation. The Tana Bhagat Movement has many facets. It can be read as 'peasant consciousness' (Singh, 1988), tribal insurgent consciousness marked by economic reasons (Chaudhury, 1989), a class struggle and ongoing power dispute between landlords and *begari* workers (Mohaptra, 1991), or between forest people and others. The lens of Sibu gives another perspective to the indigenous struggle. His concerns lie deep with the children, the most marginalized of them. The entire Tana Bhagat Movement is centred around nonviolence, while violence was rampant in the world that surrounded them. It is difficult for children like Sibu to understand the need for interference and involvement. The outcry of the tribe is simple—they wish to be left alone.

This book offers a rich tapestry of spiritual awakening, social reform, and political resistance, all woven into the fascinating history of the Tana Bhagat Movement. It shows how a localized religious reform movement eventually became part of India's larger struggle for freedom, a transformation that will resonate with both young readers and adults alike. It's a compelling read that will engage and educate readers of all ages about this important and little-known chapter from India's past.

The writing style is descriptive and provides an evocative portrayal of the setting. Sengupta's style blends historical detail with a compelling narrative, making the historical context accessible and engaging. The narrative has travelled from archival records, historical documents, newspaper clippings, official documents and dissertations to this text that will speak to adolescents and adults alike. The cover page of the book is a mosaic representation of the life of tribals and the elements that define them.

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Sanaah Mehra

565: THE DRAMATIC STORY OF UNIFYING INDIA
By Mallika Ravikumar
Hachette India, 2024, pp. 528, ₹ 699.00

565: The Dramatic Story of Unifying India by Mallika Ravikumar covers a chapter in India's Independence that is missing from most of our history textbooks. This is a story from a time when 'Independent India was yet to be born. And already, every day, she was dying a thousand deaths.' The transition from British India to Independent India involved a crucial step: forging together a patchwork of territories, the Princely States, all armed with a powerful weapon—choice. The choice to accede to India, join Pakistan, or remain independent.

The book's dedication, 'To Appa for the love of reading and Amma for the love of research', aptly reflects its dual essence. A well-researched and highly readable work of creative nonfiction, *565* doesn't follow a chronological order, which can occasionally feel disorienting. However, this structure allows the readers to immerse themselves in any chapter and be transported to that region of India just two months before Independence. While certain details are repeated due to the non-linear narrative, they never feel redundant. The book skilfully balances theatrical storytelling with factual breakdowns, clearly distinguishing where creative liberties were taken and citing sources for the

historical facts presented.

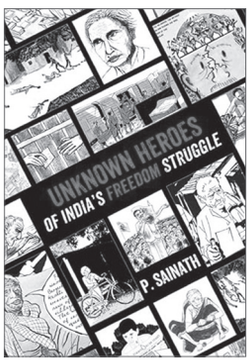
The book captivates readers with its accessible language, vivid maps, and intriguing illustrations, effortlessly drawing them into the narrative. Each chapter plays out like a suspenseful drama, where even though you know the final outcome, you're pulled into the tense negotiations and political manoeuvres. The real thrill comes from watching how the once unyielding and fiercely independent rajas gradually soften their stances. Ravikumar doesn't just present the political backdrop; she explores the personal dilemmas faced by the maharajas, nawabs, and nizams, who were grappling with the sudden loss of power and the uncertainty of what their future would hold. The book reveals how their decisions were influenced not only by political alliances but also by personal relationships, regional pressures, and even moments of doubt and hesitation. These rulers, who had for so long enjoyed autonomy, suddenly found themselves caught in the crosshairs of history, and the author paints a vivid picture of their internal struggles, adding a human layer to the grand narrative of nation-building. The emotional depth of these portrayals gives readers a deeper understanding of the intricate web of power, pride, and compromise that shaped the unification of India. With every turn of the page, you find yourself eagerly anticipating how each of these rulers is persuaded, keeping you hooked as the story unfolds in surprising ways.

The author masterfully brings the key players of India's unification to life, allowing us to see beyond their titles and into their fears and motivations. Rather than painting the rajas as mere obstacles, we feel their deep sense of betrayal by the British and growing distrust of Congress—emotions that simmer beneath their political decisions. The stress mounting on leaders like Nehru, Patel, and V.P. Menon is palpable as they face the challenge of weaving together a nation while contending with rajas who, like them, dream of sovereignty. The book hints at the anxieties of ordinary Indians witnessing this upheaval, but this thread feels somewhat underexplored, leaving readers curious for more.

565: The Dramatic Story of Unifying India is an engaging read, specifically for younger audiences unfamiliar with this often-overlooked episode of India's unification. Through humour, drama, and cliffhangers, the author keeps readers hooked while shedding light on the immense effort it took to unify the Princely States into the India we recognize today. It's a brilliant balance of entertainment and education, offering a fresh perspective on the nation's history that feels anything but tedious. Whether you're drawn in by the suspense or the historical lessons, this book makes an important part of India's past accessible and captivating.

Vishesh Unni Raghunathan

UNKNOWN HEROES OF INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE
By P. Sainath. Illustrated by various artists
Tulika Books, Chennai, 2023, pp. 217, ₹ 400.00



Unknown Heroes of India's Freedom Struggle is a collaboration between Tulika and the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI). The words by P Sainath, who met and interviewed the various heroes, bring to light sixteen stories of individuals whose contribution to the Independence struggle went unrecognized.

While we recall the names of the most famous heroes, such as the Mahatma or Netaji, India's Independence from colonial rule was won through the grit and determination of lakhs of Indians. Beyond urban India, rural India played a huge role in the struggle for Independence. Whether it is small towns, or tribal villages so remote that it takes days and months for major external news to reach, the heroes covered in the book come from all walks of life. In the words of the Mahatma, 'Great men seem to be the cause of revolutions in the world. In truth, the people themselves are the cause.'

The book covers people from all parts of India, from those who were part of the Toofan Sena (like Captain Bhau and Hausabai)—an organization that ran a parallel government in and around Satara, to Bhagat Singh Jhuggian in Punjab and Mallu Swarajam in Telangana. Some are pacifists following Gandhi's footsteps, while others, like those part of the Toofan Sena, believed in a more radical approach to taking on the colonizers.

The book is a wonderful introduction to the lives of various freedom fighters, especially at a time when the ideas of freedom and independence are much debated. Many of them have passed away owing to natural causes in the last few years; many living into their late nineties and some even past hundred, and there's almost no person living left who was part of the Independence struggle. The book focuses on what Independence and freedom meant to these heroes and highlights the importance of free speech and dissent in an era where anything and everything is seen as politically motivated against the interest of the country.

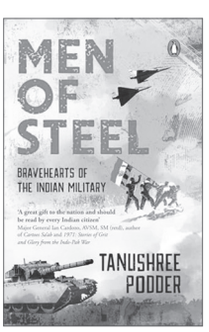
Sainath and PARI's mission of bringing these stories to life and collecting them to preserve for posterity is an initiative that deserves appreciation. The art by various artists (a different person for each story) brings to life the narration. The graphics help in picturing the world, past and present—worlds that may be alien to many, especially the urban elite.

The stories are important for everyone to know, especially to young readers in an age when religious Right-Wing indoctrination works hard in belittling the efforts made to win Independence from colonial rule. The book can be used in schools as a part of critical reading. The graphics help us understand the milieu better, and the language is crisp and honest. India as it is today is a vast country, but her freedom was hard fought for and won by people from every corner of the country. Preserving these stories is essential not just for our present, but for our futures as well.

Vinatha Viswanathan

MEN OF STEEL: BRAVEHEARTS OF THE INDIAN MILITARY
By Tanushree Podder
Penguin Books, 2024, pp. 184, ₹ 275.00

'... all their stories deserve to be told.'



Covering the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, the Kargil war of 1999, the 26/11 Mumbai Terror Attack of 2008 and the Galwan Skirmish of 2020, this book tells the tales of bravery and heroism of our soldiers on the battlefield. Each section begins with a context of the war or attack, setting the background for the following stories of each warrior. Each of the 18 soldiers' stories has his military background, his tale of bravery and a brief bio. These soldiers range from the lower ranks to upper echelons and many have been awarded posthumously. Each tale also helps you relive the last moments of each of these soldiers, and that experience can be both thrilling and chilling. These men were aware of what they were doing to themselves. And yet they continued so they could protect their mates, their country. Their actions had far-reaching consequences for the war, their country, the morale of their fellow soldiers and the lives of those they left behind. The brief bios of each awardee allow the reader to picture them as not just fighters with exceptional courage on the battlefield, but also with the courage to leave their normal, average families; the safe and happy lives they could have lived to join the armed forces. With details of battalions, postings and dates of skirmishes, this book will engage those interested in military history. However, the layperson, who may need a few sittings to read the entire book, will find it worthwhile. Reading a few stories at a time may also mean giving each of these men the attention and thought they deserve.

In this book we learn something of the history of battalions, of the movement of forces, of wartime strategies and the reasoning behind tactics employed in times of conflict. We also come to understand how decisions in wartime are made keeping in mind our strengths and weaknesses, not just in terms of soldier numbers and equipment sophistication but also the current political climate and international scrutiny. And most importantly, how the terrain, weather and the help of fellow brave soldiers and civilians is critical in such situations. I think the reader learns to understand all the factors that help winning, or losing, a conflict.

The book leaves the reader proud, and responsible. Proud of our armed forces, of the bravery and dogged determination of our soldiers who protect us. And burdened because their lives are our responsibility. It behooves us to take war and the lives of our citizens in the armed forces very seriously. We simply have to take each decision we make in wartime and peacetime that will affect them, and eventually us, with a lot of consideration.

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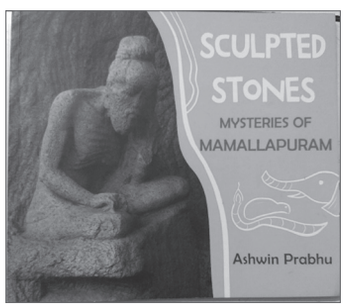
Shailaja Srinivasan

SCULPTED STONES: MYSTERIES OF MAMALLAPURAM
By Ashwin Prabhu. Photographs by Nithya V.
Tulika Books, Chennai, 2023, pp. 68, ₹ 365.00



With *Sculpted Stones: Mysteries of Mamallapuram*, parents and educators have the wonderful opportunity to guide children on a journey of art appreciation while visiting the site—helping them develop observation skills and critical thinking. Together with Nithya V's brilliant photographs, author Ashwin Prabhu encourages children to observe with curiosity and pay attention to detail.

At the outset, all the styles of stone architecture and sculptures from Mamallapuram–cave temples, monoliths, structural temples and elaborate open-air sculptures on rock faces (relief sculptures)— are described. For example, the author explains how for the structural temples, the stone blocks were prepared or carved separately in a workshop and then stacked and assembled at the chosen site, much like modular blocks of LEGO (would be wonderful if LEGO adds a Mamallapuram set to its iconic building sets, of which the Taj Mahal is one!). He asks open-ended questions: What was Mamallapuram? A trading port? A capital city of Pallava dynasty? An open-air art gallery?

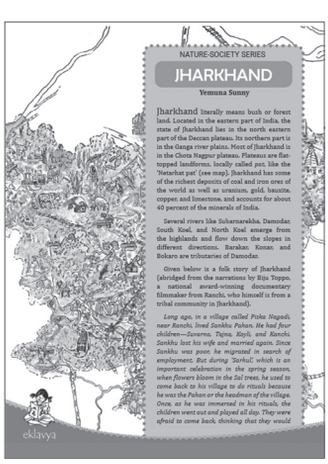
Prabhu encourages them to form their own opinions and interpretations, and support their ideas with evidence from the artwork itself. He illustrates this while talking about 'a *tapasvin*…and a god' from the mammoth rock face. He describes the sculpture–man standing on one leg, arms aloft, fingers locked. He encourages the reader/visitor to closely note the appearance–sunken cheeks, ribs sticking out, dressed only in a loin cloth and the sacred thread, long beard and closed eyes—everything about him conveys he is a *tapasvin*. Then he raises the questions–What is the *tapa* (penance) for? To receive a boon? From whom? Prabhu then leads the reader to the sculpture to the right of the *tapasvin* describing all the attributes which would make you conjecture the sculpture to be that of a god. As you read along, Prabhu brings in a story from the epic Mahabharata (the possible inspiration for the sculptors), about Arjuna's gruelling penance at the end of their 12-year exile in the forest to get the Pashupatastra weapon from Lord Shiva. Arjuna's form was described as 'arms raised, without support, balanced on the tips of his toes,' like the figure of the *tapasvin*. Prabhu asks, 'Is this Arjuna?', and then complicates matters by citing another episode from the Mahabharata, of a *tapasvin* in penance amidst the Himalayas (sculpted in stone, of course!), to bring the sacred river Ganga down from the mountains to immerse the ashes of his ancestors. Prabhu then asks, 'Or is the *tapasvin* Bhagiratha?'. The author rightly emphasizes: 'There doesn't always have to be one story– because there is so much in the past that we don't know yet. A past that is waiting to be discovered.' The book has been designed well and has a good visual appeal. There is a colourful schematic map of Mamallapuram. While the text mentions the location 50 km south of Chennai, marking the city on the map would give a better spatial relation. I would personally have liked to see the location of each sculpture/panel under discussion, marked in a small schematic on the page, to provide its location in context or reference to the surrounding sculptures, to perhaps add to the inquiry and understanding. Brief history and timeline from late 3rd to early 4th century CE to 700-728 CE is included at the end. The author has devoted a lovely section to 'Looking at the Art of Stone Sculpting', which delves into a deeper understanding and appreciation of the process of creation by the stone masons and *sthapatis*. Very clever typography—different fonts, sizes and colours have been used to present information. An exclamation mark in a yellow star gives explanations or definitions, and information boxes with hand-drawn boundaries give snippets of history or facts.

All in all, a wonderful addition both to Tulika's non-fiction list and to your book shelf!

Rosy Yumnam

NATURE SOCIETY SERIES: JHARKHAND
By Yemuna Sunny. Illustrated by Kanak Shashi
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 12, ₹ 80.00

This small book on Jharkhand by Yemuna Sunny is part of the innovative Nature-Society Series on Indian States brought out by Eklavya. It builds on Sunny's rigorous and long-term engagement with social geography which also informs her earlier book, *Sprout: A Social Geography of Rajasthan* (2014). Whereas


NATURE-SOCIETY SERIES
JHARKHAND
Yemuna Sunny
Jharkhand literally means bush or forest land. Located in the eastern part of India, the state of Jharkhand lies in the north eastern part of the Deccan plateau. Its northern part is in the Ganga river plains. Most of Jharkhand is in the Chota Nagpur plateau. Plateaus are flat-topped landforms, locally called pat, like the 'Netarhat pat' (see map). Jharkhand has some of the richest deposits of coal and iron ores of the world as well as uranium, gold, bauxite, copper, and limestone, and accounts for about 40 percent of the minerals of India.
Several rivers like Subarnarekha, Damodar, South Koel, and North Koel emerge from the highlands and flow down the slopes in different directions. Barakar, Konar, and Bokaro are tributaries of Damodar.
Given below is a folk story of Jharkhand (abridged from the narrations by Bijo Toppo, a national award-winning documentary filmmaker from Ranchi, who himself is from a tribal community in Jharkhand).
Long ago, in a village called Pirko Nagadi, near Ranchi, lived Sankhu Pahan. He had four children—Sonarmo, Tipna, Rupi, and Kanchi. Sankhu lost his wife and married again. Since Sankhu was poor, he migrated in search of employment. But during 'Sarhul,' which is an important celebration in the spring season, when flowers bloom in the Sal trees, he used to come back to his village to do rituals because he was the Pahan or the headman of the village. Once, as he was immersed in his rituals, the children went out and played all day. They were afraid to come back, thinking that they would
eklavya

traditional geography would reduce a place to its physical landscape, its breadth and length, or a statistical mapping of the people and a study of its flora and fauna, Sunny's work brings a dynamic understanding of land that is in interaction with its people and various institutions.

Starting with the etymological meaning of 'Jharkhand', which means 'bush or forest land', the reference to a folk story gives an idea of the cultural landscape of the people that reflect and overlap with the physical landscape. Sankhu Pahan unites with his family during the spring celebration of Sarhul when he returns home to perform his customary rituals as the village headman. His four children who wander off for fear of being scolded first transform into meandering snakes and eventually into streams spreading far and wide in different directions— 'Suvarno became the Subarnarekha river, Koyli became the Koel river, and Tajna and Kanchi became rivers of those names. Later, Sankhu Pahan also became a river called Sankh' (p. 1). The significance of nature for the people of Jharkhand is captured not only by the theme of metamorphosis wherein the human and the non-human coalesce to articulate an anthropomorphic worldview that is in harmony with nature, but also by the way 'familial time', the time of union when the father returns home, is regulated by, and is in tandem with the cycle of nature, the blooming of the flowers of the *sal* trees in spring.

The story also underscores another important aspect of the people's lives: unemployment and the history of migration in Jharkhand. Jharkhand has 'the highest outflow of the working age group of people in the country' with more than '5 percent of Jharkhand's working age population' migrating every year, 'to cities and States across India' (p. 9). If heavy taxation and famines forced the people to migrate for work during the colonial period, in the postcolonial period, data from the Economic Survey of India shows how about 50 lakh people had migrated from Jharkhand between 2001 and 2011 (p. 9).

Introduced as 'a land of forests and rivers', Jharkhand is largely inhabited by tribal people whose 'livelihoods are based on collection of forest produce, animal rearing, and cultivation' (p. 3). Home to 32 different tribal communities, with some of the richest mineral deposits in the country which account for about 40 percent of India's minerals, the State has been a site of people's struggle. From the Chuar Rebellion (1766-1816) which resisted the destruction of forests to the Santhal Rebellion of 1855-56 against new permanent settlements for cultivation and revenue collection under the British, the very creation of Jharkhand itself is a culmination of the people's enduring struggle for survival and sustenance. Significantly, the author highlights how the tribal communities were 'the earliest protestors against the British' since the latter brought changes in land settlement and land use which effectively aimed at transforming 'the tribal production system' to establish 'the zamindari system' (p. 7). This erosion and destruction of the tribal mode of production and subsequent policies like the declaration of 'protected forests' have further alienated the tribes from their land and resources.

In postcolonial India, the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) which was founded in 1948 has evicted about 213 villages over the years. Large-scale industrialization and 'developmental projects' in tribal areas have transformed the natural landscapes with what the author calls 'human landscapes'— roads, flyovers, cities, dams, mines, factories, etc. (p. 6). The conservation projects of the government such as the creation of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries have paradoxically removed the tribal population living in the forests and destroyed the tribal way of life. With the gradual privatization of space in the name of development, many tribes have been engaged as contractual labourers in mines, exposing them to different forms of health hazards and life risks. Mines run by the Uranium Corporation of India (UCIL) have glaringly flouted safety regulations resulting in a staggering number of at least 50,000 people being at risk of exposure to radiation (p. 10). The setting up of mines and factories have not only resulted in people losing their lands, livelihoods and their eventual 'pauperization' (p. 9), but they come at huge human and environmental cost which will continue to wreak damage for hundreds of years to come.

Sunny's text highlights the transformation of Jharkhand from 'the land of forests and rivers' to 'a land of industries and mines' (p. 8), and raises critical questions for young minds to rethink the very nature of development, land rights, ecological challenges, environmental sustainability and social justice. While it captures the tragic paradox of Jharkhand being one of the richest sources of minerals and the continued disenfranchisement of its people, it also highlights positive developments that have come out of the people's movement, ranging from the introduction of the Chota Nagpur Act in 1908 to the creation of Jharkhand in 2000 and the institution of the Forest Rights Act in 2006. The photographs registering traditional knowledge and skills like pottery, metal craft and architecture also present hope for alternative models of sustenance and holistic development.

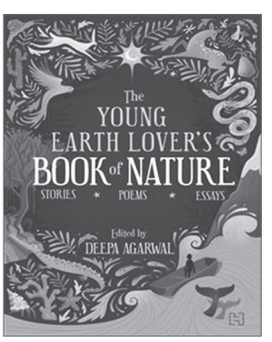
Interspersed with information boxes that provide additional knowledge for better understanding, the book also frames interactive exercises and tasks for learners, opening up more vistas for inquiry and introspection. It comes with an innovative map which introduces and defines new pedagogic models that move away from the project of epistemic hegemony that lies at the heart of modern maps. Rather than being guided by the logic of control and demarcation, the pictorial representation of the map underscores the importance of interdependence,

bringing the human and the non-human together, and challenges the nature-culture binary to generate a new awareness of actions and their consequences.

The book is ground-breaking in the way it brings together culture, history and geography within a few pages and manages to create a synergy of facts and ideas for social change through text, photographs and the map. Reading this book has been reinvigorating, to say the least. If anything, one could ask for more pages.

Bharati Jagannathan

THE YOUNG EARTH LOVER'S BOOK OF NATURE: STORIES. POEMS. ESSAYS
Edited by Deepa Agarwal
Hachette India, 2024, pp. 271, ₹ 499.00



A budding romance between Mad Mozart and Melody fizzles out before it has even properly begun, all because the ambitious hero was too clever by half! This delightful tale of courtship of magpie robins, complete with rivals Beethoven, Bach and Hariprasad Chaurasia, and neighbourhood gossips—a noisy set of jungle babblers called Screechers and Shriekers, based on accurate field observations by Ranjit Lal, sets the tone for this gem of a collection.

The selection ranges across centuries: three poems in this collection are by poets (Barry Cornwall, Lord Byron and William Wordsworth) who were born in the late 18th century, while a veritable constellation of stars—Charles Darwin, Jim Corbett, Jules Verne, Mark Twain, Tagore and Robert Frost among others—keep the standard of the 19th and early 20th centuries flying. And then there are contemporaries like Ranjit Lal and Zai Whitaker, absolutely outstanding writers without whom no anthology on the natural world can be complete.

George Schaller's 'Three Eagles, Three Dangers' takes us across the Tibetan plateau with Deki, a dog who seems to have belonged earlier to someone called Tashi (this is an extract from a novel), but forges a warm friendship with our protagonist, Karma, as the boy embarks on a lonely and spine-chilling trek (both literally and metaphorically) to convey a statue of Padmasambhava to safety. As they encounter wolves, Chiru—the Tibetan antelope, and eagles in that harsh terrain, the boy and the dog learn each other's language, and help each other survive.

In 'Galapagos Archipelago', extracted from the fascinating journal of Darwin, whose voyage on the HMS Beagle launched him into the world of flora and fauna, we find the twenty-two-year-old noting not just the botanical variety of the places he visits, but also details about the terrain and climate. In this particular section, Darwin records his observations on the tortoise, Testudo Nigra, beginning with his wonder at an as-yet-unseen animal that travels along very methodical tracks!

'Kari's Travels', Dhan Gopal Mukherjee's hair-raising tale of a journey through a forest on elephant back, contained, I suspect, traces of plausible fiction deftly woven into realistic prose. The impression is strengthened by a second essay of his in the collection, 'Education of Gay-Neck'. Perhaps his success in the American literary establishment in the early 20th century owed, at least in part, to the fascination of his credulous audience with the tropical world he seemed to realistically describe, but actually fantasized! This is not, however, to detract from the evident dexterity of his craft.

In 'Surfing with an Alien in the Andaman Sea', Manish Chandi recounts how, during an annual exploratory circuit of the Andaman Islands, their small motorized canoe was caught in a storm. The half dozen men on boat who had set out for a routine two-day trip are tossed about within an inch of their lives, are blown entirely off-course, find themselves hunting and roasting fruit bats if they are not to perish from hunger, and finally land safely through extraordinary courage and teamwork and the exceptional skills of their captain, Saw Pa-Aung, whom they call 'Uncle'. It is only on returning to home shores, and encountering surprised (and relieved) fishermen who had been following radio warnings of the terrifying cyclone, that they realize the degree of peril they had been in!

Yet another story of human endurance in exceptionally challenging terrain is Francis Younghusband's account of reconnoitring in the Karakoram ranges. Younghusband is looking for a way to Baltistan through a long-unused pass called Saltoro which he had heard about. He is very much a Sahib, with his Gurkha escort, orderlies and coolies, ponies and a '*balti*', and mentions his relief at return, after many harrowing days amidst glaciers, to a camp where he could finally sit on a camp chair! I was amused and astonished, never having imagined carrying such things, and having only squatted on the ground or on convenient ledges during my very mildly challenging treks in the Himalayas! My sense is that the author was an explorer-cum-cartographer: the late 19th and early 20th centuries was when many parts of the world were being 'mapped' for the first time; I wish there had been a note from the editor explaining that. Instead, we get a bland introduction saying that 'miles of ice and snow might seem bleak and dismal to most people but they move true nature lovers...'. It is surprising that the compiler/editor

of this volume can even imagine the adjectives 'bland and dismal' in the context of the highest mountain ranges on earth. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that compares with the magnificence and sheer power of the higher Himalayas.

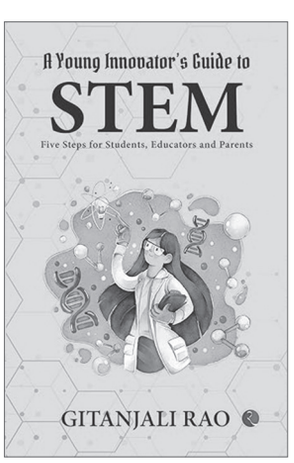
Ajeet Bajaj's narrative of rafting down the Alsek River in snow-bound Alaska and Canada's Yukon Plateau was another edge-of the-seat thriller, with icebergs, rapids and grizzly bears! Apparently, there are signboards on that route warning adventurers how from that point onwards, they 'are part of the food chain'!

Ruskin Bond's biographical piece about his grandfather's encounter with an ostrich in East Africa, recounted in the first person, is as delightful as one has come to expect from the master storyteller. His poem, 'Cherry Tree', was, however, curiously disappointing. In fact, almost all the modern 'poems'—I am inclined to call them 'attempts at verse'—were, with rare exceptions like Zai Whitaker's 'Mr and Mrs Scorpion'—quite poor. Tennyson, Byron, Emily Dickinson are, I realized on re-encountering them after decades, evergreen. Sarojini Naidu's 'The Coromandel Fishers' delighted with its folk musicality. But the contemporary stuff featured here—no, it's not poetry!

But the prose pieces? At least two dozen fabulous essays and stories besides those I have mentioned make this anthology a sheer delight. Go, get your copy!

Aisha Kawalkar

A YOUNG INNOVATOR'S GUIDE TO STEM: FIVE STEPS FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS AND PARENTS
By Gitanjali Rao
Rupa Publications, 2023, pp. 166, ₹ 295.00



Children around the world, when asked to think of a scientist, more often than not imagine a middle-aged, eccentric-looking, white, male scientist (indicate various studies using the Draw-A-Scientist-Test). Now, picture this— the speaker of a TED Talk is announced to be 'America's top young scientist and innovator', who was on the Time magazine cover in 2020, and you see a teenage young woman of colour walking up to the centre stage. That is Gitanjali Rao, breaking barriers like age, gender, ethnicity and stereotypes of who can excel at STEM. She is passionate about STEM and also about sharing her love of STEM. The result of this passion is her book, A Young Innovator's Guide to STEM in which she earnestly shares her personal experiences and knowledge to motivate and guide young minds interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Young people today are growing up in a rapidly changing world with burgeoning problems that were hardly known fifty years ago, and traditional approaches and tools are proving to be inadequate. Therefore, we need an innovation movement, and as Gitanjali points out, there shouldn't be an age barrier to solving problems. Young readers are likely to find inspiration in her personal stories and feel more confident in their own potential to innovate. The vignettes about what motivated her innovations, how she worked for them and the persistent efforts she put in despite early setbacks make her a relatable role model. One of the strongest aspects of the book is Gitanjali's authentic voice. She is fairly earnest in describing her journey and doesn't shy away from sharing her hesitations and fears while working on a problem, and then goes on to share how she navigated through them.

For a young author, she is amazingly reflective and puts in a lot of metacognitive thinking to walk us through the innovation process she follows. Based on her experience, she breaks down the process into manageable steps and covers bases from conducting background research to getting grants and even navigating failures—a crucial aspect of innovation. Her instructions are clear and easy to follow, delivered in engaging language.

The book is full of actionable tips on how to narrow down on a problem, explore the issue that one is passionate about, find mentors and reach out to them, build following design thinking, develop a prototype, and finally, communicate one's innovation. Illustrative of her practical guidance is how she discusses the pros of collaborating with others along with the cons, and the possible solutions to address these difficulties. Handy tips like how to draft a letter to a probable mentor or how to use a timeline for planning will be useful guides to jumpstart an innovation journey. There are worksheets after every step described and links to useful resources.

Beyond technical advice, the book emphasizes the importance of creativity, curiosity, and perseverance. The part I liked the best is where she explicitly addresses stereotypes of who can do well in STEM disciplines. She urges that one doesn't have to be 'gifted' and solve a problem all by themselves. It would be good enough for young people to take the responsibility to engage with the problems around them, figure out how they can help and create awareness so actions are taken. Further, reflecting on her experience of being a girl in STEM and why fewer girls opt for these disciplines, she makes a case for

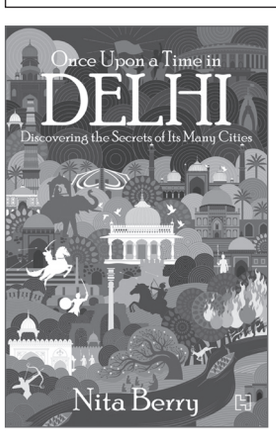
inclusivity and diversity in these disciplines underscoring that the unique experiences, issues and needs of the marginalized may be overlooked and the solutions may not fully represent them if they aren't part of solving them.

Another significant point Gitanjali makes is to have a clear focus on science and technology for social change. She stresses the importance of empathy in innovation, encouraging readers to focus on solving real-world problems that can have a positive impact on society. This is a refreshing perspective that broadens the lay view of STEM as being solely about technical skills, highlighting the importance of social responsibility.

I was a bit sceptical of the book at the outset, wondering how a book could do justice in guiding someone in the complex field of STEM or even the process of being an innovator in, say, five steps and was wary about the possibility of oversimplification. Some of the claims did raise my brows—like trying to teach 'how to think creatively', and a few adages, here and there, also seemed inane, for example, 'nothing can stop us now but ourselves' or 'all you need is purpose and determination'. However, the book kind of grew on me as I continued reading it, for the sheer earnestness with which it is written to inspire the next generation of thinkers and creators and equip them with the tools they'll need.

While the book is primarily aimed at young readers (middle school to early high school), it could also be a valuable resource for educators and parents who wish to foster a love for STEM in children. Gitanjali acknowledges and highlights what her parents did to support her and what role mentors played. Additionally, the book also includes lesson plans on the steps involved in the innovation flow. Interestingly, some countries like Kenya and Uganda have adopted some of the sections of the book for use in schools.

Book News ***Book News***



Once Upon a Time in Delhi: Discovering the Secrets of its Many Cities by Nita Berry is about India's capital Delhi, a storehouse of legends and lore, history and mysteries, secrets and stories. Every nook and corner, pathway and rock here hides a tale – of triumph and defeat, riches and ruin; of builders, sculptors and artists, royalty and rebels; of saints and common folk, poets, writers and thinkers – waiting to be uncovered.

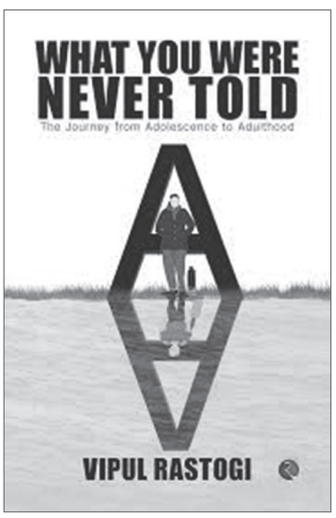
Hachette India Children's Books, 2024, pp. 232, ₹ 499.00

Shubhra Seth

WHAT YOU WERE NEVER TOLD: THE JOURNEY FROM ADOLESCENCE TO ADULTHOOD

By Vipul Rastogi

Rupa Publications India, New Delhi, 2024, pp. 219, ₹ 395.00



This book is a must read for all age groups, particularly the young adolescents, and members who closely interact with this age group. The author presents each section as a matter of conversation with young people. The book discusses the much talked about 'stress' and its coping mechanisms, while making space for the reader to pen down their feelings and provides strategies to manage stress. The various examples from different case studies as presented by the author make the theme dealt with under each section real and relatable. To understand the ecology of failure and how we can view it differently is an important chapter in the book under Part 1. Relationships and break-ups are two important points of discussion and concern amongst the adolescents, and this book gives vital insights into the importance of having healthy relationships, coping with break-ups without losing self-esteem and the openness with which one must approach counselling if required under emotional duress. Social media and how much it impacts the self-esteem and persona of an adolescent have been dealt with sensitively by the author. The book also refers to Maslow's pyramid and the goals left unachieved because we constantly keep measuring ourselves through people's opinion about us. To be connected in this ocean called digital world and in the rising and ebbing tides of social media, every individual has to be a careful surfer and evaluate the depths of water lest they get drowned in the world of 'like, share and comment'.

The section on health is very interestingly divided into five chapters with discussions around sleep cycle and sleep hygiene, nutrition for adolescents, physical fitness and exercise and supplements, sexuality and sexual orientations, and women's health and contraception. Details about nutrition and fitness regime are important takeaways from this book. Changes experienced during puberty, understanding dietary requirements and charting out a regime for physical fitness will all seem doable for

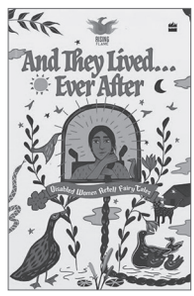
the young teenage readers amidst their busy day's schedule after reading this book. Physical intimacy, safe sex and taking adequate protection—each of these questions has been dealt with patience and sensitivity in this book and can answer several questions which one may not be comfortable asking family and friends.

The section on career and finance deals with examinations, career choices and the question of earning money. This section is a good read for parents too, as they will find important tips and methods for handling their child during examination pressure tests. The chapter on the question of money like a log book explains terms like debit and credit cards, loans, and taxation and investments—much to the benefit of the young reader.

Addictions and mind matters discuss multiple subjects ranging from screen addiction to substance abuse to caffeine addiction. Being in an age of experiments, several adolescent boys and girls get trapped into the vicious and damaging cycle of drugs and nicotine use. Key points enumerated for parents and the young reader are important and have been written by a practising doctor who has vast experience having dealt with varied medical cases in his field/specialization. The concluding section on mind matters underlines the importance of mental health, to understand concepts like anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and self-injurious behaviour. Each aspect has been explained with sensitivity and enumerates points on prevention, intervention and treatment. The helpline numbers (p. 206) are a thoughtful addition to the chapter and are deeply appreciated. This book is a sincere attempt by a concerned citizen to reach out to the youth in the country so that they grow up as confident and informed adults who understand that physical fitness and mental health are both complementary to each other. The detailed bibliography is equally nourishing like the sections in the book for readers of all age groups.

AND THEY LIVED... EVER AFTER: DISABLED WOMEN RETELL FAIRY TALES
By various authors
HarperCollins Publishers, India, 2024, pp. 213, ₹ 399.00

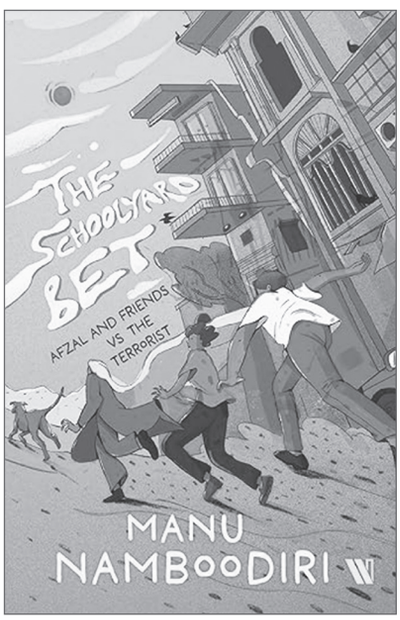
Cotton clouds of imagination amidst the cool breeze of emotions. The symphony created by various characters from the human and the animal kingdom. Fairy tales have weaved themselves in the warm quilt of childhood for many of us. These stories for generations have come alive with their characters seeming so real and identifiable, yet at other junctures limited to our imaginations. This anthology is a fabulous collection of fairy tales narrated by disabled women piecing together their lived exercises. In a world still struggling to practise inclusivity, such initiatives are deeply appreciated as they open a gamut of emotions, actions and thought processes which should have been routine for all of us by now. Often the special schools or separate schooling create compartments in education where the young minds begin to perceive the world as divided into two categories, 'normal' and 'disabled'. The stories in this anthology are chapters of independence; stories of struggle where each woman has had to remind the world, including her family, at times of her presence, her existence and being accepted the way she is.



These fairy tales shall interact with the readers where an iconic character like Snow White can be hearing impaired and communicates through sign language; story reading can in itself be re-invented to make it more inclusive for all hearing-impaired children. Shabdo, the trusted hearing aid, magnifies sounds and enables hearing through varying frequencies and at times the disturbing whistles. The story of Rapunzel highlights a very important aspect of the responsibilities a state has towards its people by providing them basic infrastructure. Making all public places accessible and disabled-friendly with ramps, tactile pathways, accessible restrooms, etc. is a recent initiative which is still under construction and needs to be revisited regularly. The stories of Maryam, Zara, Agalvizhi and Aditi celebrate difference and disabilities. The confidence with which a visually impaired woman can navigate herself through the city reaching her workplace or educational institution makes the 'normal' people nervous. Because very few have ever given a thought about the challenging world where women walk confidently with white canes conducting their everyday lives; a world where a tiny gadget like a hearing aid makes the ear come alive with sounds and shrills. A world where a wooden limb or a wheelchair translates into wings to walk and fly. This anthology draws a canvas of various disabilities, introducing the young readers to the understanding that differences do exist but the victory of these tales is in the niche that each one has carved for them, and the moral of the story is—'It's Still Your Choice'. For the disabled readers, each fairy tale is a roadmap that challenges will come but it's their determined choice to fight them out and set the graph of their lives. While for the 'normal' or the temporarilyabled readers, these stories present real life stories and it is ultimately their sensitive choice to understand, assimilate, appreciate and never to 'other' the disabled whom they meet or interact with in the stations of their lives. After all, we are all just temporarily abled.

Chandra Chari

THE SCHOOLYARD BET: AFZAL AND FRIENDS VS THE TERRORIST
By Manu Namboodiri
Westland Books, 2024, pp. 290, ₹ 299.00



'Afzal looked around and examined the gaggle of terrorists on the Pakistani end of the bridge, a sniper pointing at them from the helicopter hovering over the border and an armed ISI agent standing on their finishing line.'

This quote from the book highlights the cast of characters which Afzal and his friends encounter in their hair-raising adventure in Pakistan. Manu Namboodiri in *The Schoolyard Bet: Afzal and Friends vs the Terrorist* has spun an extremely readable tale for the YA. Terrorism, conflict between nations, and the intricate web of intelligence and counter-intelligence are all part of the vocabulary which the social-media savvy young teen today is very familiar with. Namboodiri has pitched his tale around India-Pak relations but also in the context of the 'othering' of the Muslim community in India today. Afzal, the chief protagonist is however lucky in his two staunch friends, Beena a Hindu and Rup a Sikh, in the prestigious boarding school in the hills. The schoolyard bet happens because Afzal feels he has to prove his patriotism in the face of the ignominious suggestion by the school bully that he belongs to a family of terrorists involved in the murderous attack in Mumbai decades ago. Afzal's determination to clear his family's reputation wins over his two friends' efforts to make him give up his hair-brained scheme, which is to bring the chief perpetrator of the Mumbai attack to justice in India from a prison in Pakistan.

Is Afzal's scheme 'easy peasy' as he claims it will be? Can the trio ever imagine that it would have to deal with intelligence agencies, drug dealers and terrorists armed to the teeth and planning fresh incursions into the Indian territory from the word go as they cross into Pakistan?

Here is where as a reviewer I have a quibble. The first half of the book takes one through a scenario where the three friends are able to reach their destination, to the prison where Latif the terrorist is living a life of luxury, with unbelievable ease. The people in charge of law and order appear naïve and stupid (one often sees this in English movies on the World Wars where the Germans are easily duped by the British). However, the second half makes up for this fault line: the book becomes unputdownable when reality hits the trio. Some nice touches are bits of history woven in like the capture of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi war criminal by a small team to stand trial in Israel, the opening up of the Kartarpur Sahib corridor for Indian pilgrims by Pakistan, and Osama bin Laden's hideout in Abbotabad and others.

There are twists and turns, and the final destination back to India across the border seems close yet far away, fraught with danger at every step. The author shows how nothing is black and white, and even a hidebound Pakistani intelligence agent lets his humanity peep through his tough exterior. To say more would be a spoiler.

A copy editor's red pencil was what the book needed, especially in the first half where much repetitive phrases and dialogues could have been got rid of. Due diligence would have also prevented the use of unnecessary adjectives and misspelling of words; *niqab* instead of *nakab*, for instance.

Minor quibbles notwithstanding, Manu Namboodiri has come up with a winner for teens.

Nalini Kalra

EVERYTHING SUCKS
By Andaleeb Wajid
Speaking Tiger Books, 2024, pp. 264, ₹ 299.00

This book is a breeze to read. A refreshing one from the adult fiction genre. Andaleeb Wajid has a lovely knack of touching the depth of human relations and pressure-filled environment of social media in a manner that makes the reader enjoy the book, but at the same time question the current times that we live in. Her flair for delving into both these aspects without seeming to preach about them is exemplary.

Social media at times can make us live a dual life. One that we put out for the world at large to see, and the other our 'true' self which we probably don't even show or share with our dear ones. We smile for the world hiding our true thoughts, feelings, pain and sorrows. In other words, we keep a part of us hidden. The book makes you question and wonder about this social media existence of the protagonist where she is a celebrity with a million followers. But she too has a side that the world doesn't know about, just the way her family doesn't know about her life on social media. Is there anything wrong with either? Well actually, no. It takes a small incident for Kashish to realize that.

For this realization to dawn she is helped by a small time 'newbie' influencer Sameer. They both make mistakes and come out better human beings, thanks to unexpectedly meeting each other.

The book brings out an important fact, rather a reality, that in the current times no one can live aloof from social media—be it a middle-aged homemaker or a lovable grandmother. There is a lot to share with the world of social media and loads to learn from it. Not to belittle the fact that nothing can be stronger than a family bond; the love and camaraderie that it brings is unparalleled.

An interesting read with an apt and engaging cover telling you that everything sucks…till it actually doesn't.

Melody Xalxo

MUNIYA'S QUEST
By Mandira Shah
Speaking Tiger Books/Talking Cub, 2024, pp. 224,
₹ 299.00

Muniya's Quest by Mandira Shah is one of the best adventure novels for young adults. The story is about finding a family that was lost 12 years ago. This book is a captivating and emotional rollercoaster that follows the journey of Muniya, the protagonist, who learns the shocking truth of her birth—that her Abbu is not her father at all, and that he had found her, abandoned, on a train. When Muniya sets off to find her lost family, she ends up on the adventure of a lifetime. In this journey, she navigates the challenges of growing up, family expectations and her aspirations. At the same time, she struggles to find herself stuck between the unknown truth and hypothesis which led her to lower her confidence and self-esteem.

The storyline starts with a filmy scene with lots of emotions—pain, love, grief, and hope—which last till the end of the story. The story is based in the countryside of West Bengal. Going through all the chapters gives a clear idea about the village; it provides a chance to explore village life as it has a detailed description for every setup. Relationships and bonding among the people of that particular area reflect the society. On the other hand, the story also tries to show people with different interests and childhoods.

Muniya's character development is remarkable, making her relatable and endearing to readers. Her character is so powerful that it can pull the readers to feel the pain and anxiety that she experiences. This book offers a heartwarming and empowering portrayal of a young woman's journey, making it relatable and inspiring for readers. Young adults and everyone must read this book as it has a realistic representation of challenges faced by women in society. Muniya as a character plays a role model for readers in building their life skills such as self-awareness, adaptability, and empowerment.

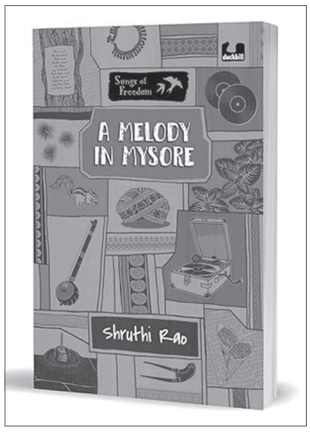
The writing style of this book is engaging, accessible, and clear. There are vivid descriptions which brighten the characters and/or the spaces. There are several authentic dialogues between characters that feel natural. It is a book of approximately 220 pages which makes for a quick and enjoyable read. The story is divided into chapters which helps in connecting all the ongoing processes in the story. Some illustrations could be added in every chapter for connectivity. Overall, it is a thought-provoking and inspiring novel.

Manika Kukreja

A MELODY IN MYSORE (SERIES: SONGS OF FREEDOM)
By Shruthi Rao
Duckbill Books, 2024, pp. 138, ₹ 250.00

The book is about Leela, a twelve-year-old Mysore girl growing up in pre-Independent India, 1932. The story explores growing up in Mysore, a progressive town under the Maharaja's rule rather than being directly under British empire, and Mysore's interaction with the freedom struggle. The fictional story is a part of Duckbill's 'Songs of Freedom' series and is written by

the vivacious writer, Shruthi Rao.



Leela stays with her *ajji*, her grand-mother, and the family of her father's cousin. Her father works in Bangalore, so he visits over festivals and holidays. Her mother passed away soon after her birth. But, as the saying goes, 'it takes a village to raise a child'—she is raised by and in a community of neighbours, passionate teachers, and youthful friends.

When Leela's *meshtru*, her teacher at school, tells them about how powerful Gandhiji's speeches are, she can't help but wonder, how powerful his voice be. Thus starts the journey of interaction with her community on the freedom struggle tidbits (psst– it is worth reading to find how she describes MK Gandhi's voice).

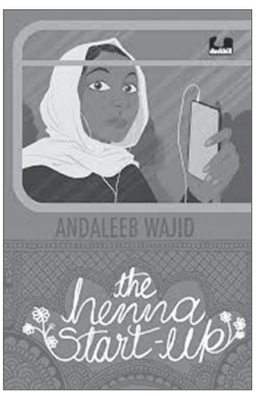
Unlike many other freedom fighter narratives, the thrilling and passionate moments arise out of *alilu seve*–squirrel service of supporting the movement from a distance. Doing a small part to keep the movement alive and spread it to the masses. The tale is a refreshing and clever take on self-rule. The way characters go about their routine activities and yet in their own ways contribute to the movement. It is to be able to govern yourself; to be able to take decisions for yourself without being pressured or directed by someone else, isn't it? The movement or a cause feels closer to the life being lived.

The story gives an opportunity for the young and adult readers to discuss and reflect upon taking responsibility for the community, finding ways of being a part of it. Debate over the idea of getting inspired by someone vs. idol worshipping. Understanding various roles individuals take around an issue. Some might seem important and others trivial. Rao's words will inspire the readers to see how any trivial looking task is a drop that makes the ocean.

The Kannada flavour that this book brings with itself is simply scrumptious. I felt nourished with Kannada noun vocabulary and entryway into songs! Afterall, the book's name is *A Melody in Mysore*. Shruthi Rao does a wonderful job of bringing the idea of songs and melodies as a cultural bonding tool through Leela's narrative.
I loved reading the book and would be happy to share with all my friends, family and my teenager students. If you are looking to introduce or discuss history with a young adult, or if you are looking to churn the mind over finding meaning to one's acts and routine tasks–this will be a good read for you.

Vinatha Viswanathan

THE HENNA START-UP
By Andaleeb Wajid
Duckbill Books, 2023, pp. 272, ₹ 299.00



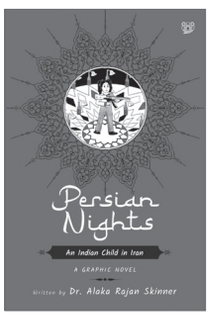
Abir is a teenager in the second year of her PUC (12th grade) in a college in Bengaluru. She is a hard-working, studious girl who is focused on her ambitions which do not include an early marriage as planned by her Abbu and Ammi. She is an angry young woman, and in her attempts to assert herself and seek justice for herself and her mother, she misjudges her friends. A tech competition in college that she is desperate to win means she needs to work in a group and with male classmates and friends, something her family is quite against. To make matters worse, one of her workmates is a boy she is attracted to, and another is one that her family wants her to marry. *The Henna Start-Up* is a story about how Abir tries to achieve her dreams by employing any means necessary, and how she flicks away the chip on her shoulder about the world being against her as she learns to differentiate her friends from her foes.

The Henna Start-Up is the coming-of-age story of a girl from a conservative family who struggles, makes mistakes and has to overcome many threats and challenges for the simple freedom to study what she wants and to have the friends she likes. It is also a romance in which a young adult has to face her feelings for someone whom she both likes and distrusts. The book, though, is not just about Abir; it also is about her family and friends, as well as their social groups. The story affords us a good look at a diverse group of people from different backgrounds, their relationships, their ups and downs. There are many pleasant aspects of this well-woven story— the fact that Abir is interested in technology, something many girls don't even consider or give up on before long; the fact that she recognizes the struggle faced by her mother and steps up to help her with her own skill; that she resents the patriarchy of her family and society, realizes how it stands in the way of her own and her mother's dreams, and finds a way to break out of those restrictions; and finally, the positive note that the story ends on, giving much hope to our resilient but often bogged down teens and young adults.

The Henna Start-Up is a feel-good story with a time-tested plot that has been refreshingly written, a book that should be in our bookshelves.

Andaleeb Wajid

PERSIAN NIGHTS: AN INDIAN CHILD IN IRAN
By Alaka Rajan Skinner. Illustrated by Shweta Allam, Vishnu Jadhav and Chadrashekhar Aher
Speaking Tiger Books, 2024, pp. 80, ₹ 499.00



A slim volume, *Persian Nights* is a true story told in the voice of an ebullient narrator, the author herself. The graphic novel begins on a startling note with an image of a young girl holding a machine gun, surrounded by what seems like a spinning circle of Molotov cocktails. But before we get to that, we are taken along for a gentle ride with the narrator, where she explains how her family moved to Iran.

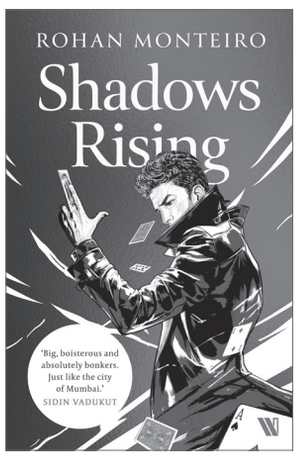
With her father being offered the position of professor in a renowned university in Tehran, the narrator describes how she and her mother waited to join him once her baby brother was born. Life in Tehran was exciting and fun, and there was much to marvel over the similarities and differences in food and culture. The narrator's experiences growing up in a city that was on the verge of revolution is enlightening, especially to readers who have a very vague idea of the events that went on to change the country.

There is no place for gloom and doom in this monochrome graphic novel, even though the events in the narrator's life slowly begin to change. Her parents grow increasingly worried with the presence of armed forces in the city. Yet, they continue to live and hope; her father teaching in the University, while she and her brother continue to go to school. The resilience of those who have adopted a country as theirs seems remarkable, nevertheless.

The city's landscape changes before our eyes. There are tanks on the roads, blockades everywhere, and soon, our narrator is given a machine gun to hold by a kindly neighbour, which is obviously not appreciated by her mother. The narrator, her mother and brother watch Molotov cocktails being flung about on the streets and classrooms are now slowly getting bereft of classmates.

The Islamic revolution as seen through the eyes of a young narrator offers a sense of safety with which to observe the events. There is a heartwarming sense of longing and love for the adopted country which beams off the pages. Despite the comparison to Persepolis in theme and execution, *Persian Nights* is more flowy and less staticky, which could be due to the narrator's distance as a result of being an outsider. Overall, *Persian Nights* is a wonderful way to introduce young readers to an important point of time in Iran's history without overwhelming them with anxiety or negativity.

SHADOWS RISING
By Rohan Monteiro
Westland Books, 2024, pp. 288, ₹ 399.00



An urban fantasy crossover with Indian mythology, *Shadows Rising* stands apart because of its protagonist Akran, a *yaksha* who has been cast out from the celestial court for reasons we are not informed right away. Akran is fictional and has no counterpart in the Mahabharata but other characters from the epic make their way into this crisply written novel by Rohan Monteiro. 'Our world intersects with yours often enough, but you don't see us. We live within the cracks of your universe,' Akran informs the readers succinctly.

However, the world of humans and the world of Akran is about to intersect spectacularly and soon enough. When the novel begins, Akran is at a bar, but is approached by an absent-minded professor type who needs his help in finding his granddaughter who has been kidnapped. Akran reluctantly agrees to help because his reputation as a 'finder of lost people and pets' precedes him, to his utter dismay and disgust. Akran prefers to stay away from people and technology in no order whatsoever, but he lives in one of the busiest cities of India–Mumbai, and he inevitably gets sucked into what seems like a regular kidnapping.

On close inspection, there is nothing regular about the kidnapping and this sets off Akran's alarms. A particularly chilling scene with a teddy bear sets the scene for what ensues–lots of high-stake action and drama–interspersed with interesting conversations with some fascinating side characters: Shukra, K and Sars, along with the exquisite Deanne who turns out to be a Valkyrie.

Akran's banishment from the celestial court has come with certain caveats. He has very minimal use of magic and there's no way he can stand a chance against some of the more powerful villains and even demons who are on his trail. There's also a chunk of memory missing, and little by little, some of it reappears in his dreams, but without giving him much clue to go on. Akran has an enchanted deck of cards which he uses to get away from trouble and going by the image on the cover, it all comes off very slick and smooth. However, the cards don't help much when Akran is really deep in trouble.

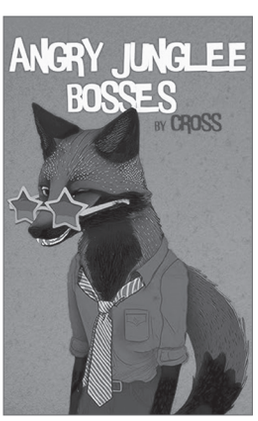
When Akran learns that the kidnapped girls–yes, multiple girls–are being used as part of a ritual to bring

back a great evil into the world, he has very little time to stop it from happening and yet he must try his best, because the powerful person on the other side has kidnapped Shukra and is using him for nefarious means.

The climax is indeed nail-biting and takes place on a floating tanker in the sea. It's also the place where the last piece of the missing jigsaw puzzle fits into place, for a satisfying finish. Akran starts off as an amoral protagonist at the beginning of the book, reluctantly helping people find their lost belongings but by the end, his transformation is complete. Entries from Akran's private journals that precede most chapters are written with irreverence and wit, overall lending a cheeky sort of charm to the book.

Arushi Barathi

ANGRY JUNGLEE BOSSES
By Cross
Angry Junglee Bosses, 2023, pp. 226, ₹ 500.00



Angry Junglee Bosses by Cross is a fine satire about the human world, rendered as a flight of imagination in a world where COVID-19 has wiped out all human beings and brought in the Age of Animals. Cross writes deftly and with an assured hand, subtly giving out lessons on the importance of conservation, while sardonically snarling from the sides of his mouth at the Corporate way of life. *Angry Junglee Bosses* had me hooked ever since I read the blurb of the book. Not only did the book promise a ride through corporate culture but it had the added edge of presenting the same through an animal world. The book met my expectations perfectly as I could relate to everything that Fox went through in his corporate life, from first-day jitters to corporate backstabbing. The book holds a lot of promise as the element of mystery that shrouds the office life of the animals is also very well planned out. There is a continuous thread of humour and sarcasm that binds the story together.

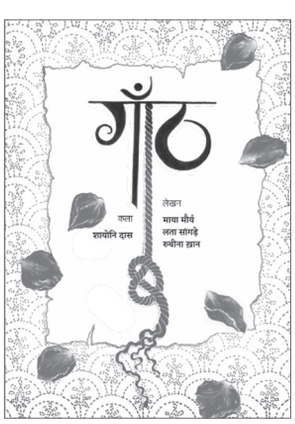
Cross has put in a lot of thought and work into the book as he chooses the animals for each job perfectly. From rhyming names with popular human performers to choosing animals for their popular skill sets, one can clearly see the meticulous planning and plotting put into the book. The corporate culture shown in the book is something that every employee reading the book would relate to. From giving their hundred per cent to the job to figuring out who to keep happy, this book can be their sympathetic ear. The only problem that I encountered in the book were a few grammatical mistakes that I believe another round of editing can remove.

There are a few lines and phrases that especially stood out to me: the idea of setting up a momo stand— 'Yes! That is something that is quite popular right now and which corporate slave hasn't wondered the same while having street food? I wonder if I would be happier and better off owning a street stall rather than working a nine-to-five, LOL'; '...What no one understands is that creativity rarely comes on the spot, it takes time to produce creative work…'; 'Take them with a pinch of salt, boss, they're very good animals. They've been under a lot of pressure lately and it has all been Hippopotamus' doing. A lot of animals will dance on his grave when he dies.'

Sadly, I can't share the line I loved the best because of the fear of it being a spoiler, but I can guarantee you that when you read it, you would know that it is going to be everyone's favourite part. So don't wait anymore and get your copy of this book as soon as possible.

Amman Madan

GAANTH
By Maya Maurya, Lata Sangde and Rubina Khan.
Illustrated by Shayoni Das
Muskaan, 2024, pp. 40, ₹ 100.00



Hatred needs to be watered and cultivated for it to last for a long time. Peace and fraternity too need to be encouraged, renewed and reinforced for them to hold fast and to grow. Narratives of sufferings due to racism, communalism, casteism and patriarchy play an important role in strengthening resistance to the evil side of humans. This strengthening must begin with early childhood and go on with late childhood and youth. Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* is a classic for this purpose, which has been read in schools and youth groups in many countries. When we see the world from the

eyes of a young girl growing up under racist persecution, we can no longer be indifferent to discrimination and genocide. In India, the short stories of Sadat Hasan Manto shock us into seeing people as people during the Partition and not as Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Unfortunately, in India there are not many stories and narratives that can be used in schools or with youth. Muskaan's collection of six stories in Hindi—*Gaanth* (The Knot) steps into that gap.

Muskaan has been working for over two decades with poor and marginalized communities of Bhopal. *Gaanth* brings together the narratives of three women who were little girls during the riots of 1992, which took place after the destruction of Babri Masjid. The stories are based on the authors' own experiences in Bhopal in that period. Maya Maurya writes about her childhood with the sounds and smells of the neighbourhoods of the poor. She writes about the games they played and of what the children would love to do. She also writes about the many Hindus and Muslims who lived in her neighbourhood and about how Muslims disappeared after their houses were burned down. Lata Sangde talks about being a Hindu with Muslim neighbours during a time of fear and mistrust. Rubina Khan tells what it feels like to have a Hindu mob beating and burning Muslims on the road outside your home. In between the stories are short reminiscences by Munni Bi, Ganji Bai and Mohammad Hanif of Hindus and Muslims hiding members of the other community from the violent mobs.

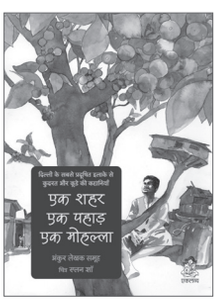
What shines through all the stories is the human ability to build bonds across social boundaries. If there are social forces which raise fences between 'us' and 'them', there are also social forces which build deep connections across fences. *Gaanth* is about the knot that blocks and also perhaps the knot that binds. The authors rue the growing segregation of religious communities in Bhopal. There is a sense of something beautiful having been lost.

The stories have flowing and exuberant illustrations by Shayoni Das which serve as counterpoint to the horror and love in the stories. Through the eyes of the little girls, we begin to see the lives of Bhopal's poor. The reader is drawn into sharing their joys and their terror. The characters in the stories come through not as members of an alien community, but as people like us. The book may be quite effective in getting young readers to understand the vivid horror of communal riots. At the same time, it asserts that humans have a most natural capacity to build friendships and affection across social boundaries.

A note at the end of the book correctly lays the blame for the continued tensions in Bhopal on the promotion of hatred and fear by politico-religious groups aligned to Hindutva. It could have also addressed the history on which these were built, the long past of separation of social groups and the complex trajectory of hostility and bonding between them. These have provided the fertile ground for organizations engaging in politics of hatred to flourish. A stable solution needs relations between religious communities to also be unravelled and reknit, the growth of new norms of political entrepreneurship and the emergence of institutions which can draw all groups into them. The role of books like *Gaanth* can be to germinate fresh bonds and to strengthen old ones. They build in children and youth a composite imagination of social life, moving away from the single-community realities of today's neighbourhoods.

Ragini Lalit

EK SHAHAR, EK PAHAD, EK MOHALLA
By Ankur Lekhak Samuh. Illustrated by Allen Shaw
Eklavya Foundation, 2023, pp. 132, ₹ 200.00



Ek Shahar, Ek Pahad, Ek Mohalla is a collection of stories from the most polluted part of Delhi–stories of Khichdipur and the adjoining areas around the Ghazipur landfill. The stories are written by the adolescents and youth living in the Khichdipur area, and all of them are connected to the Ankur Society for Alternatives in Education. The book is divided into five sections and speaks to the synchrony of humans, trees, animals, flowers, air, water, noise, and garbage as all of them actively shape and are shaped by each other in Ghazipur. The sections of the book are interspersed with photographs of the area, and the stories are accompanied by vivid watercolour sketches by Allen Shaw. The illustrations savour and capture the unhurried moments that the stories present.

The writing of the stories that make up this anthology breathes life into a part of Delhi that has always been in the news only for being the most polluted. Instead of the usual language of lack, disadvantage and calamity that accompanies places like Khichdipur in mainstream media, here we read about the coming together of people who form the *bastis* and homes of the various blocks in Khichdipur. We are introduced to the people whose livelihoods have revolved for years around the landfill, and we feel the daily hustle and bustle of lives as people and trees watch their communities grow. In all these stories, the landscape of Ghazipur's enormous landfill and the many questions it raises are omnipresent, but alongside that are the many moments of friendship, laughter, nurturance and hardships. These are shared

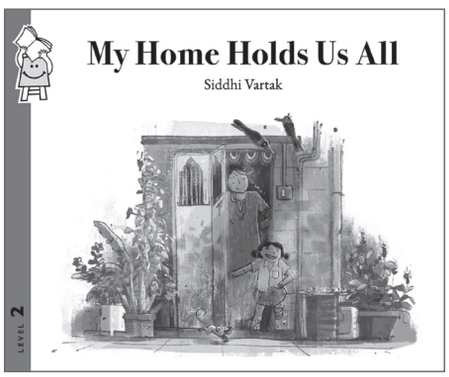
under the neem tree, while standing at the tap, at wedding functions, in the Mangal bazaar, or on the way to and from work; they are interspersed in the everyday lives of those who make Khichdipur.

Written by young writers, the stories are full of keen observations and lively details. We see the world through their eyes, endowing it with familiarity, attentiveness, compassion and often humour. The book doesn't follow a main singular narrative. Instead, each story opens a door into the past, present and future that lives on in the oral accounts of the people of Khichdipur. Under the shadow of the monstrous landfill, we are introduced to the worlds existing in Khichdipur's blocks—Dhobighat, Dairy Farm, Murga Mandi, Bangali Basti, and Indra Camp, etc. We also begin to recognize what it means to live and survive in a place that the rest of Delhi is only too glad to leave behind, covering their noses as they cross the city limits. The toxic air, water, noise, drains, chemicals, waste, and diseases affect everyone, making just existing here lethal. The writing makes these captured moments almost palpable—the terrible stench of drain water that sometimes mixes up with the water supply and comes out of taps, the watchful eyes of Ali Kabaadkaar in seeing use out of things that people have discarded from their homes, the constantly moving crowds at Anand Vihar Bus Stand like ants marching in their queues, the whispered conversations between Geeta Maalin and her garden as she checks in on her plants every morning… The foreword to the book points out how often in schools, we prioritize the national/global instead of bringing in the local. Our own histories, geographies, relationships, local cultures, concerns, and issues are not considered worth inquiring into or understanding; in that light, this book is a proud step towards producing literature by the young residents of Khichdipur on their own communities. This too is knowledge which forms the basis of our experiences of the world and these too are voices worth listening to and learning from.

I wholeheartedly recommend this book to everyone—young and old readers alike. Both for readers unfamiliar with Ghazipur and looking to explore while holding the hands of these trusted young writer-guides and for those who have never thought about it, this book compels us to expand that which we comfortably hold in our worldviews. It's an important addition to the small but growing shelf of literature written by children and youth, and I hope it finds space in schools, learning centres, libraries and homes of all kinds. It might also inspire budding writers who are seeking to write stories of their own lives and find their distinct voices, for this book is a beautiful example of what careful and compassionate listening looks like.

Bansi

MY HOME HOLDS US ALL
Written and Illustrated by Siddhi Vartak
Pratham Books, 2023, pp. 16, ₹ 75.00



All life needs and occupies space—space for the first leaf to sprout and space for turning in at nightfall. What kind of spaces do we live in and call home? Beetles claim scorching dunes, peepul claims cracks in the walls, pigeons nest anywhere pigeon-ly possible. Who all do we live with? We reclaim the bathroom from the lizards, negotiate sleep with the neighbour's laundry bat, carry thousands of microbes in our body, and it goes on and on. We live and co-live, move and rest within all kinds of spaces. These spaces 'come alive' with colours and textures, sounds and smells, and we call them ours. *In My Home Holds Us All,* Siddhi Vartak weaves the many such aspects of a home.

A bustling urban *basti* greets on the first page. Intricately detailed roofs and fixtures, water tanks and antennas, herons perched on the pillars, the mosque top with loudspeakers and orange flying festoons leave one transfixed… Bela calls it all her home! The book then moves on to glimpses of the *basti* in warmth invoking colours and thoughtful perspectives. Her home is quiet or noisy, dark or sunlit, dry or wet and has colours of all kinds. Dampness and pickles do tease one's olfactory sense, but it's otherwise missed! As the text describes the home in various contrasts, a game runs in the pictures, revealing itself only in the end with a *'dhappa*!'

Many more stories unfold! Vartak unabashedly etches the space crunch, the makeshift bathrooms, the worn out walls, and the many saffron festoons. But among that life is thriving with the poise of everyday togetherness: *achaar* on the roof, *papad* drying, cleaning of grains. Some structures are makeshift, the life-processes aren't. It's home for all. The young and the old, the humans and the animals, Muslims and Hindus. The story leaves little doubt about that as the text poetically paints:

Aaji's pickles, a whole chatter of squirrels and the dusty afternoon sun — my home holds us all.

The short, sometimes lyrical sentences weave simple concepts. Vartak's work, especially the brilliantly captured illustrations linger long after reading the book.

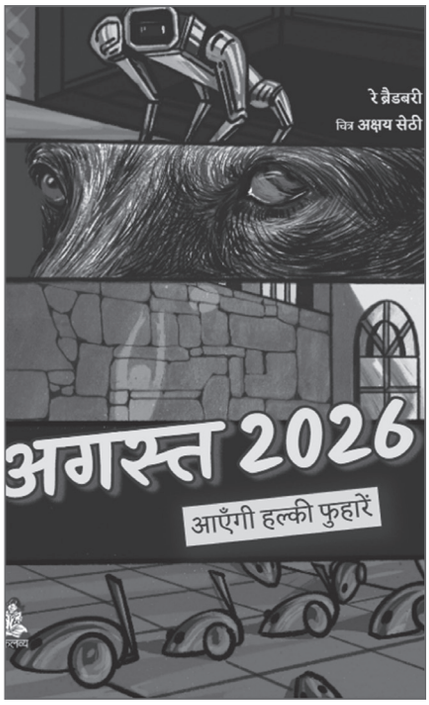
Asfia Jamal and Kaniska

AUGUST 2026: AAYENGI HALKI FUHAAREIN
By Ray Bradbury. Translated from the original English by Laltu. Illustrated by Akshay Sethi
Eklavya Foundation, 2024, pp. 40, ₹ 75.00

August 2026: Aayengi Halki Fuhaarein is a Hindi translation of Ray Bradbury's famous 1949 English sci-fi/dystopian short story, experimented for the first time into a graphic book. The original story by Bradbury reflects on the existential question of the future of humanity at the historical juncture of technological advancements on one hand, and destruction during World War II on the other. Through this book, the young reader will find intersections/overlaps between 1918, 1949, and the 21st century.

Aayengi Halki Fuhaarein is a snapshot of 5th of August, 2026 in the lone surviving house in the aftermath of nuclear annihilation of humans in California. It transports the readers to a human-less world where machines perform all the mundane chores catering to human needs from 7 am to 10 pm. Humanity's presence is palpable through the machines' clockwork activities—from making breakfast to reading Sara Teasdale's famous 1918 poem, *There Will Come Soft Rains*. And that is where the title of Bradbury's original story comes from, translating to आएँगी हल्की फुहारें. Teasdale's words through automated machines are a poignant reminder of humanity's creation outliving humans. The romantic packaging of the technological future as the ultimate answer to humankind's existential problems falls flat as one reads through the short story.

'दो बजकर पैंतीस। आँगन में ताश खेलने के लिए टेबल उभर आए।



अलग–अलग पैड पर ताश की पत्तियाँ चित्तियों–सी फरफ़राईं। अंडे के सलाद वाली सैंडविचों के साथ उम्दा शराब के जाम ओक लकड़ी से बनी बेंचों पा आ पहुँचे। संगीत बजने लगा। पर टेबल पर सन्नाटा था और ताश की पत्तियाँ छूने को कोई न था।'

The language of the book is compelling and poetic and unputdownable. The lucid Hindi translation of the story by Laltu displays a work of linguistic intricacies. The illustrations by Akshay Sethi complement the richness of the machine world.

On a fundamental level, the book would push the young reader to question humanity's invincibility and technological advancement in times of climate change, artificial intelligence and COVID-19. Though this book will not answer all the questions, it puts forth more complex questions for readers to follow and explore. It can be an excellent classroom book experiment with varied pedagogical methods for different age groups. Teachers and educators can play a vital role in supporting a younger audience to research and discuss the complex history of human civilization and development.

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Our Contributors

Aisha Kawalkar is passionate about all things related to teaching and learning. With a doctorate in science education, she has donned many hats as a teacher, teacher educator, curriculum developer, and researcher. Currently working at Eklavya Foundation, she finds herself drawn, more and more, to issues of identity and equity in education.

Amit Kulshrestha is Professor at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Mohali, with interests that span mathematics, education, and their broader impact on society. He is passionate about observing and developing pedagogical tools in mathematics at all levels.

Amman Madan studied Anthropology at Panjab University, Chandigarh and Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He has been with Eklavya and has taught at Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, IIT Kanpur and Tata Institute of Social Sciences. He is now at the Azim Premji University, Bhopal.

Andaleeb Wajid is a hybrid author, having published more than 45 novels in the past 15 years. Andaleeb's YA novel, *Asmara's Summer* was adapted for screen to become *Dil, Dosti, Dilemma* on Amazon Prime. Her YA novel, *The Henna Start-up* has been shortlisted for the Neev Literature Festival Award 2024.

Aniket Chouhan is an urban practitioner with his areas of focus on caste in urban regions, poverty, social protection, and informal workers. He has previously worked with the Center for Education and Communication as Associate Researcher and Archivist. He currently works with Eklavya. He holds an M.A. (History) from University of Delhi, Delhi and was awarded Urban Fellows' Program in Indian Institute for Human Settlement (IIHS), 2022-23.

Anil Singh works with Tata Trust's Parag Initiative as Lead, Professional Development. Anil publishes his writing regularly in journals and blogs on his experiences in the classroom, children's literature and his observations about the state of education in contemporary society.

Anjali Noronha has been working on curriculum development and teacher education in Language and Social Science with Eklavya and with State and national bodies. She develops critical, democratic and creative literacy programmes for language learning and reading abilities for the age-group of 3 to 14 years.

Anjana Neira Dev is Associate Professor of English at Gargi College, University of Delhi.

Ann Susan Aleyas teaches English Literature as Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, Delhi. She was recently awarded a doctoral degree for her research on Syrian Christian traditions.

Arushi Barathi, a book blogger and reviewer, is currently working in the editorial and marketing departments of Om Books International.

Asfia and **Kaniska** are friends who like talking about stories of climate change and the environment at length. They have been working in their respective fields of waste and floods for a while now. They are also interested in how children learn and make sense of the world.

Bansi wishes to bring out good, inclusive and accessible children's literature particularly in various Scheduled and non-Scheduled languages of Gujarat. She loves the walkways of Gandhinagar, neem trees and everything yellow, and is currently engaged in making books in various Indian languages with Eklavya, Bhopal.

Bharati Jagannathan teaches history at Miranda House, University of Delhi, Delhi and watches trees and birds.

Chandra Chari is Co-editor, *The Book Review*, and Chairperson of The Book Review Literary Trust.

Deepali Shukla is associated with Eklavya. She loves to read children's books and likes to create dialogue with children about books. She also works with library facilitators to make their library a vibrant space.

Dhruva Desai is very interested in (some would say obsessed with) picture books and children's literature. He has spent most of his life doing read-alouds of fun picture books in schools and tries to turn any room he spends a lot of time in into a children's library.

Divya Shankar, an engineering and sciences graduate with seven years' working experience in the semiconductor industry, is currently a stay-at-home mother, a freelance writer and an avid reader with a soft corner for Indian literature and historical fiction genres.

Hriday Kant Dewan currently works with the Azim Premji University. He is a founder-member of Eklavya, Bhopal and has been Organizing Secretary Educational Advisor of the Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur.

Ilika Trivedi is presently a Research Specialist at Gartner. She has previously worked with The Politics Initiative at Centre for Policy Research and as a Banyan Impact Fellow. She describes herself as a life-long learner. When she can stop herself from scrolling the internet, she researches and writes on themes of technology and human rights.

Indira Anathakrishnan is good at addressing children through the written word in the form of short stories, historical and scriptural tales, biographical sketches, plays and picture books. She is also an appealing storyteller. Her works include *The*

Phoenix in the Sky (Hachette, 2020) and *The Queen Who Ruled the Wave* (Hachette, 2022).

Ira Saxena is a child psychologist, writer, and critic of children's books on themes ranging from computer crime to Gandhian thought. An award-winning writer of English and Hindi fiction and non-fiction, she is a founding member and secretary of the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children.

Jacinta Kerketta is a poet, writer, journalist, and community builder, who is revitalizing Adivasi communities through literature and cultural regeneration.

Jane Sahi is presently working at an informal Learning Centre in a semi-urban district near Bengaluru, Karnataka. She has previously taught in both formal and non-formal settings.

Kamlesh Chandra Joshi has been connected with primary education for a very long time. He is interested in fundamental literacy, and the professional development of teachers and children's literature. At present, he is working with Azim Premji Foundation at Udham Singh Nagar (Uttarakhand).

Kavita Tiwari is Associate Editor of *Chakmak*, a children's magazine published by Eklavya Foundation. She works on translating and editing children's books, as well as science and math articles. She is also a homemaker who loves spending time chatting with her daughter.

Lakshmi Karunakaran is an arts-based educator and development professional based in Bangalore. In her previous role, she headed Parag, an initiative of Tata Trusts.

Laltu is a Hindi poet, writer and a scientist.

Maheen Mirza has a deep interest in children's literature. Working closely with Muskaan, an educational organization with a firm belief in transformative storytelling, she has developed oral and written text and visuals that emerge organically from the contexts and life journeys of children from divergent backgrounds into stories that find a tangible existence in print.

Manika Kukreja enjoys reading and listening to stories, even dreams of being a storyteller herself one day. She works as an educator and has found her community at a trust in Bangalore and an art centre in Delhi.

Maya Maurya is presently working at the Azim Premji Foundation as a Resource Person. She works on understanding teaching and learning techniques and pedagogical processes between teachers and students. Prior to this, she worked and learnt with children of various age groups and contexts at Muskaan, Bhopal for sixteen years. She likes reading experiences and articles around education and learning.

Melody Xalxo works as Project Associate with the Eklavya Foundation. She works in the Holistic Initiate Towards Educational Change Project (HITEC) at Pipariya Block of Madhya Pradesh. She completed her MA from Azim Premji University, Bangalore in 2020. She enjoys reading Children's Literature along with students and teachers. She also enjoys painting and writing, and has a keen interest in Nature Education.

Nalini Kalra (Squadron Leader, retd.) is a communication skills coach, child counsellor and nutritionist. She loves spending time with nature and whipping up healthy recipes for her family. She has a coffee table book on poetry to her credit.

Navnit Nirav is a seasoned education expert with a focus on children's libraries and rural elementary education. With over 15 years of experience, he is passionate about promoting literacy and developing engaging children's literature.

Nidhi Gulati is Professor at the Department of Elementary Education, Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi. For children, Nidhi likes to write about films. For adults, she writes about children's lives and learning, teachers, and the nature of childhood.

Nidhi Qazi is a part of the Profession Development vertical of Parag, Tata Trusts. Committed to the public education system, ensuring a fruitful learning experience for teachers and herself remains at the core of her work. When not working, she enjoys reading Hindi literature and writing free verses.

Nita Berry writes short stories, picture and activity books, historical biographies and full-length non-fiction for children of all ages.

PK Basant recently retired as Professor of Ancient Indian History in the Department of History and Culture, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi.

Rafia Reshi is Manager at a Mumbai-based consulting firm, focusing on business-to-government projects and the implementation of educational policies, particularly those related to the National Education Policy 2020, pan India. With extensive experience working with the Indian government, think tanks, and the World Bank Group, she also holds a Master's degree in Conflict Transformation and Peace Building.

Ragini has been a teacher and loves exploring using music, children's literature, and writing with her students.

Rashmi Paliwal has worked with Eklavya since 1983 as a team member who developed a new curricular programme in

Social Science for the middle-school level. Currently, she supports Eklavya's work in publications. She is involved with the translation initiative and teaching of some courses in Azim Premji University, Bhopal.

Richa Dang teaches in a Delhi government school and is a researcher at the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi. Her work is in the field of Social Inequalities and Children's Literature.

Rohan has been working in the social sector since quite some time. During his work, he has got many opportunities to interact and work with children. He wishes for local languages and dialects to have their own place in literature.

Rosy Yumnam is Assistant Professor at Dyal Singh Evening College, University of Delhi, Delhi. Her MPhil research was on Dalit literature and she has interests in Ecocriticism, literature from northeast India, American and Partition literature.

Sanaah Mehra holds an Honours degree in Sociology and is currently a Young India Fellow at Ashoka University.

Sanjib Mukhopadhyay is a freelance book editor currently associated with two Kolkata Bengali publications, *Nirjhar* and *Sahitya Samsad*. Apart from this, he occasionally writes articles and book reviews in various well-known Bengali journals.

Satish C Aikant is former Professor and Head, Department of English, H.N.B. Garhwal University and former Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla. He is a critic and translator.

Semeen Ali is a published poet whose work appears in various anthologies and has also edited anthologies both nationally and internationally. She is the Poetry editor at *Muse India* and on the Editorial team for *Red River.*

Shailaja Srinivasan is a Bhopal-based children's book editor and enthusiast. In her spare time, she loves gardening.

Shiv Narayan Gour has been working in the field of education and publication with Eklavya Foundation for more than two decades. He enjoys reading, telling stories, and writing.

Shivani Bajaj is at present, Advisory Faculty and Mentor with the Library Educators Course team of Parag Initiative (Tata Trusts). She also translates and edits for BBB—Bookworm Beyond Borders, a quarterly newsletter for Librarians published by Bookworm, Goa.

Shivi is a poet, a storyteller, and a film reviewer by the night and a teacher by the day at Queen's Valley School in Dwarka, New Delhi. She enjoys talking about politics, society and environment in her classroom.

Shubhra Seth teaches at Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi, Delhi.

Simran Sadh's interest area lies in early literacy and children's literature. She likes to take children's literature not only to children but also to their parents.

Sonam Kumari has her MA in Gender Studies and currently works as editorial assistant with Shiksha Sahitya team, Eklavya.

TCA Raghavan's latest book is *Circles of Freedom: Friendship, Love and Loyalty in the Indian National Struggle* (Juggernaut, 2024).

Toolika Wadhwa is Professor, Department of Education, Shyama Prasad Mukherji College for Women, University of Delhi, Delhi.

Upasana Chaubey, having traded the classroom for the quill, is a versatile writer who crafts tales for the young and old alike. With four books under her belt and three awards, including the coveted Bhartiya Jnanpith's Navlekhan Award, she is also a trained painter.

Vanshika Goyal is an editor, translator and trainer helping writers and artists in producing children's books. She is currently working with Room to Read, leading their reading materials development program under SERI project. She is passionate about children's books and is a guiltless hoarder of visually treating picture books.

Vinatha Viswanathan is the editor of *Chakmak*, a Hindi monthly magazine for children and of children's books at Eklavya Foundation, Bhopal. A trained ecologist, she writes on topics in nature and science for children. She enjoys working with children.

Vishesh Unni Raghunathan is not to be mistaken for a rhinoceros. He is a poet and Chartered Accountant from Chennai.

Vivek BG works in areas of children's education and literature, and finds himself always surrounded by books. He considers himself lucky to all-too-often stumble upon some gems of books.

Vivek Singh Thakur has worked with Parag as a Library Manager, in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. He holds a Master's degree in Management and in Education. Vivek began his career in education as a fellow at Azim Premji Foundation, wherein he worked closely with government functionaries, teachers and children of Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh.

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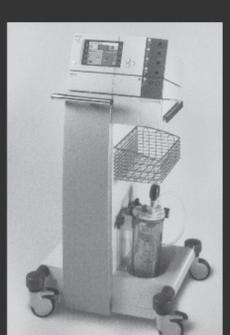

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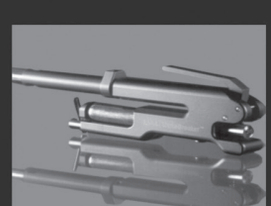

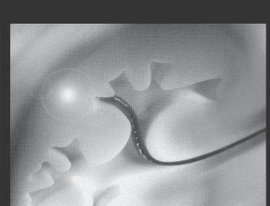

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The Book Review Literary Trust set up in October 1989 to disseminate information about advances in knowledge and books, is a non-political, ideologically non-partisan organization, and seeks to reflect all shades of intellectual opinions and ideas.

Objectives

- Publication of the monthly magazine *The Book Review*
- The running of such other magazines/publications;
- Organizing exhibitions of books;
- Organizing seminars on themes of relevance to the objectives of the Trust;
- Providing financial assistance for publishers to publish seminal works in several disciplines at subsidized prices;
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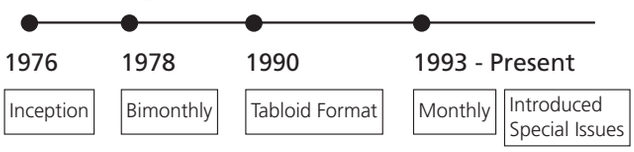
- Undertaking publication, sale and distribution of books;
- Running freelance or syndicated columns in newspapers, magazines and the like.

The Book Review

The Book Review, India's first review journal in English, was started in 1976 by Chitra Narayanan, Uma Iyengar and Chandra Chari.

The Development of the Journal: A Brief Time Line



1. Set up to promote Indian publications and Indian authors, particularly those in the Indian languages;
2. Encourage and develop high-quality translations of works in the Indian languages;
3. Develop a culture of critical in-depth reviews, leveraging the expertise of the best in a given field;
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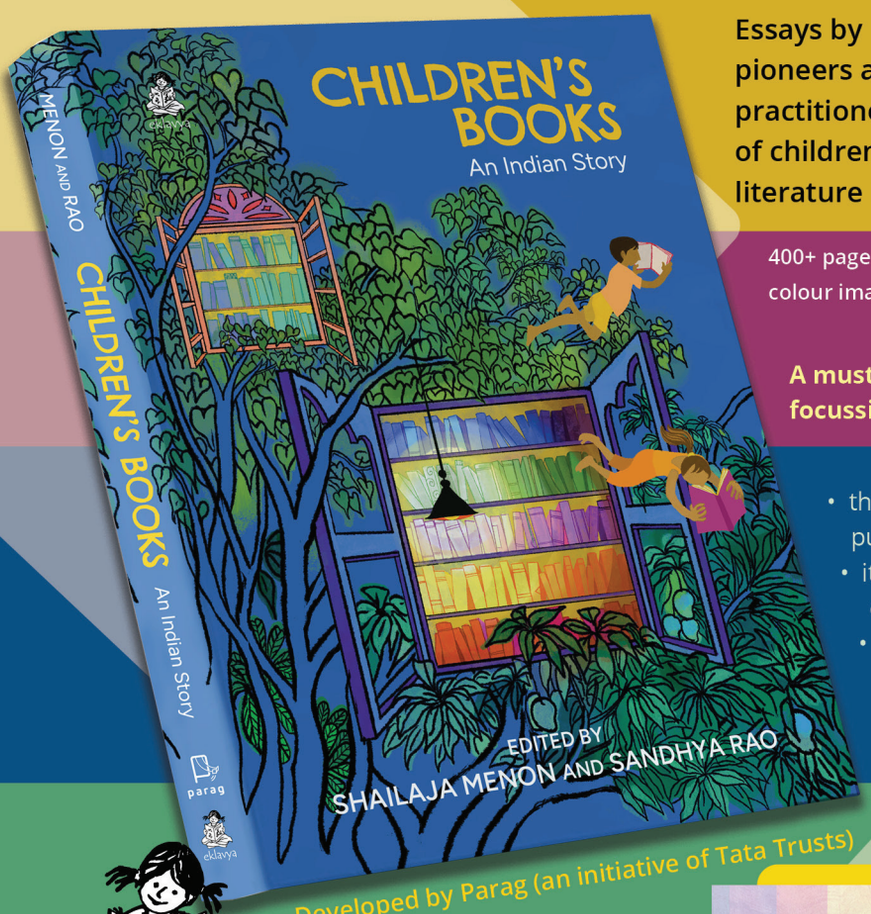
Seminars

- Big Dams and Displaced People – January 1993
- Women Writing in India: From the 6th Century to the Present – August 1993
- The Role of Critical Reviews: An International Colloquium – February 1995
- Reviewing and the Publishing Industry – February 1996
- Subversive Sites: Women's Engagements with the Law – September 1996
- Anuvaad: Linking Literatures – October 1996
- Role of Critical Reviews: A Dialogue with Robert Silvers & Rea Hederman of *The New York Review of Books* – November 1997
- On Critical Reviewing – in New Delhi, Chennai and the University of Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA between 1993 and 1997
- International seminar on -'War Peace and Hegemony in a Globalized World' – 2006
- International Colloquium on – 'Superpower Rivalry in the 20th Century: Lessons for the 21st Century' – 2008
- The Role of The Public Intellectual, March 2015
- Questioning Paradigms, Constructing Histories: A Festschrift for Romila Thapar, March 2018

Lectures

- 1996 *Toward Freedom and Beyond* –Nikhil Chakravartty
- 1996 *A Small Craft Industry:* Reflections on Reviewing – Barbara Epstein
- 1997 *On Biographies and Kings* – Romila Thapar
- 1999 *Development as Freedom* – Amartya Sen (1st Nikhil Charavartty Memorial Lecture)
- 2004 *War Peace and World Hegemony in the 20th Century* – Eric Hobsbawm (2nd Nikhil Chakravatty Memorial Lecture)
- 2014 *To Question or Not to Question: That is The Question* – Romila Thapar (3rd Nikhil Chakravartty Memorial Lecture)



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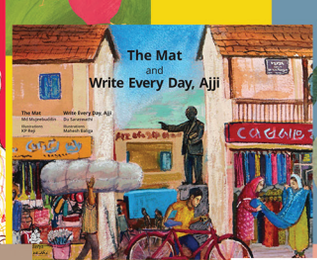

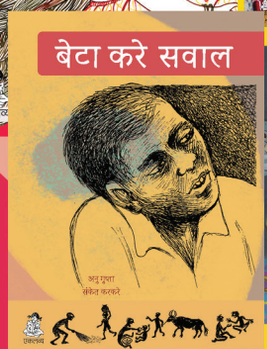

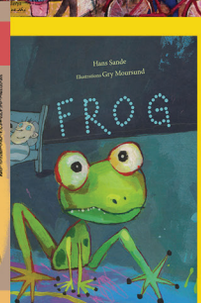

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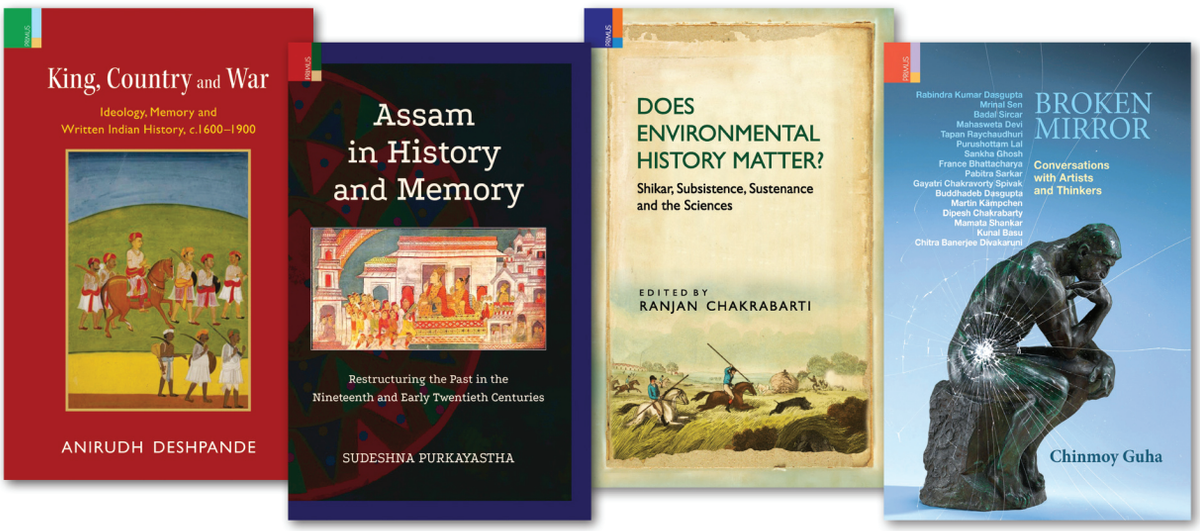
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